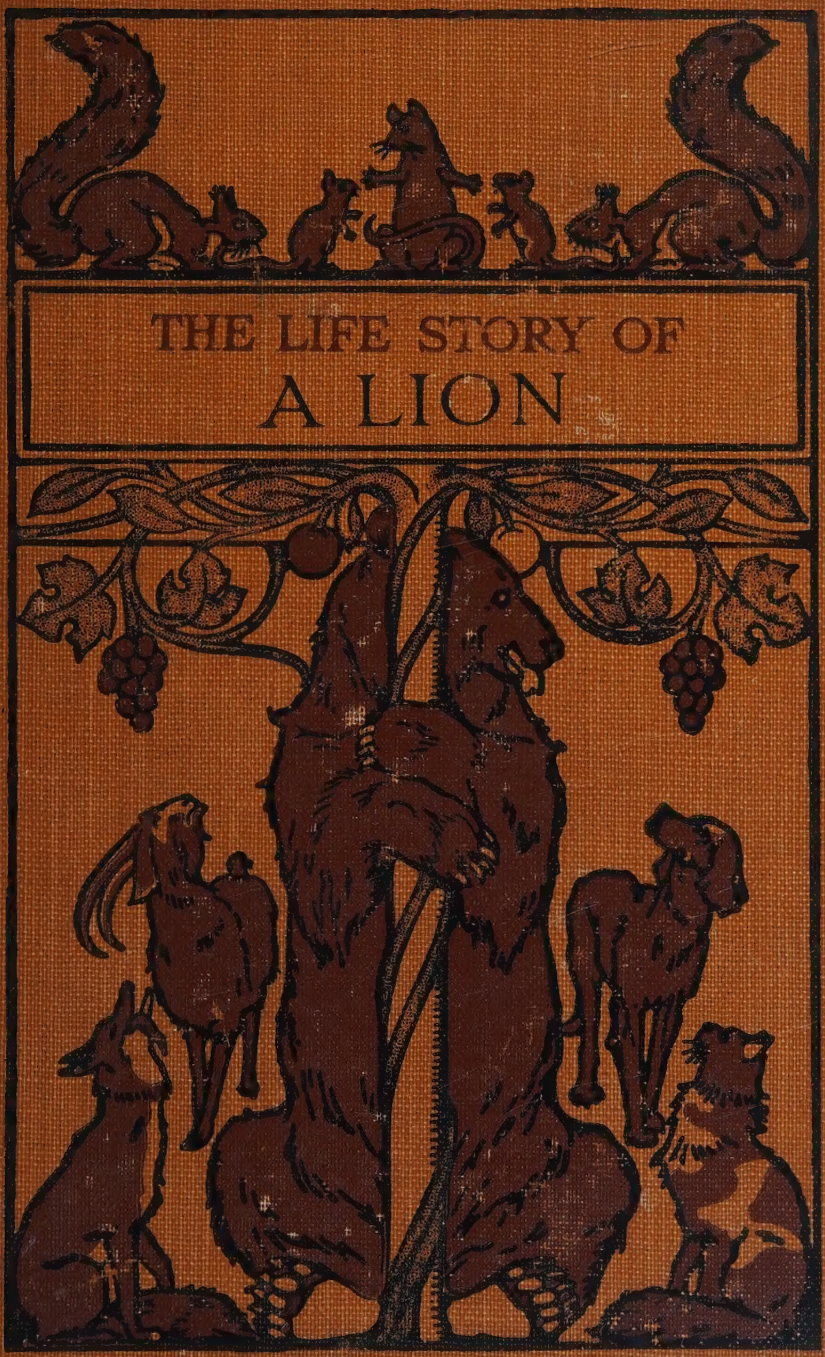
THE LIFE STORY OF A LION



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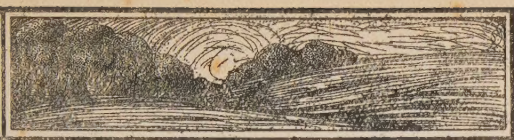

THE LIFE STORY OF
A LION

BY

AGNES HERBERT
AUTHOR OF 'TWO DIANAS IN SOMALILAND, ETC.

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'Now, Sir John, here is the heart of my purpose.'
Merry Wives of Windsor.

TO

MY FRIEND

J. W. C.

'What say you to 't, Sir John?'
Merry Wives of Windsor.

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THE LION

CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND INFANT DAYS

'His most mighty father on a hill
Stood smiling to behold his lion's whelp.'
King Henry V.

'"Have you the lion's part written?"
"It is nothing but roaring."'
Midsummer Night's Dream.

In the heart of a dense oasis, where the armo creeper, bright green with large shady leaves, grew, festooned from guda tree to guda tree, and the fairy web of the Hangeyu spider hung in golden cables from bush to bough, the lion cub was born, the only son of his mother.

Other lion matrons of her acquaintance saw eye to eye with Bwana Tumbo,* who holds that large families should be the ideal domestic policy of

* Mr. Roosevelt's Swahili name. Politely, 'The Boss of the Big Girth,' in reference to his aldermanic figure and proportions.

every good expansionist. Our lioness took issue with them all. She believed in quality, not quantity, and she had got it. The cub was the sturdiest little beast imaginable—perfect in feature and in form ; as high, perhaps, from heel to shoulder as a full-grown domestic cat, but twice as massive. His legs could not support the portliness of him—he was a prince of lion cubs.

A distinct line of dark shading ran along his spine, a beauty-mark Time would take away, and the frizziest coat of cloudy brown fitted him like a glove. It was a terribly hot robe, but the cub did not complain ; neither did he criticize his environment—man alone of all the animals does that. The world was warm and bright and very beautiful, and gazing on it, the wide-open, round-pupilled eyes were full of a great wonder. It was all too wonderful to be really real.

Then the baby fell to licking his paws amateurishly with an irresponsible tongue, until Morpheus seized him, and he lay asleep.

* * * * *

For days and days the lioness never quitted her deep-set lair. She nourished the little one assiduously, and in order to do this thoroughly gave up all her own fascinating pursuits for the time being,

and turned her back firmly on the myriad allurements of the wild.

Had she been a human mother of to-day, she would, of course, have purchased a Maw's feeding bottle of the latest pattern, a few tins of Nestlé's condensed milk, and considered she had done all which could reasonably be expected of her. Being a mere brute beast, our lioness was hopelessly uncivilized, and often did very unfashionable things indeed. And the worst of it was that she felt quite pleased with herself, and went her ways totally unashamed.

All her food was brought in by her mate, a terrifying apparition enough, the cub thought him. Vast reeking lumps of gerenük and koodoo, or, on lesser days, when the hunter's luck was out, bits of evil-smelling, maggot-filled carrion to which no lion could put a name. Glorious feasts there were when a sheep was filched from the flocks of nomadic Somalis.

What strange mandate of Nature urges a lion to drag instead of carrying a freshly-killed sheep, as he undoubtedly does nine times out of ten? He, who can, with such consummate nonchalance and ease, lift the largest antelope well clear of the ground seems to prefer the cumbrous method of

hauling a sheep over the face of the land, through briars and wait-a-bit thorns, blazing a trail in the passing, for on every spiky bush little betraying tufts of wool adhere.

The Somalis will tell you that no lion, however colossal and mighty, can raise a sheep bodily! Allah forbids. And it happened this wise. Long, long ago the lions were used to invoke the sympathy of Allah as they prepared to carry off a weighty victim to some retired banqueting-hall of the wild. 'If it pleases Allah,' the devout beast would say, 'I shall carry this zebra easily. If it pleases Allah, this heavy buffalo will be as nothing to me. If it pleases Allah, this heifer may be moved without difficulty.'

One day, however, an irreligious lion slew a sheep, and knowing he could so easily convey it to the ends of his world, Allah or no Allah, omitted the prescribed invocation. Then the Most High, in His wrath and indignation, decreed that never again should the lion tribe lift sheep in the great jaws so easily—such victims must be dragged laboriously over the ground, as the meanest hunting dog trails his prey.

Sometimes the lions fed together, or if the lion had dined previously, he magnanimously stood

aside whilst his better-half ate her fill. She was never satisfied, the cub thought. Astonishing the quantity of food that mother of his put away! She gorged and gorged, and then, not to put too fine a point on it, invariably (and considerately) retired a little distance to be violently and disgustingly sick, after which, nothing daunted, she gorged some more.

In the great heat of noon-day, when the sun hung like a ball of fire in a molten sky, the lioness, lying quiescent, would tell her cub the fairy tales and miracles of lion-land. The fairy tales were just as alluring as our fairy tales, being legends of enchanted animals and lioness Cinderellas; the miracles just as miraculous, being physical events described to those to whom they were related by others who did not see them.

How much the cub loved to listen! He heard of the rarely-to-be found plant which, once eaten, makes strong the faintest-hearted beast, and of how the ostrich got his roar, that roar which has deceived so many experienced old hunters into thinking a lion was in the near vicinity.

'Once upon a time,' the story began, as all worth-anything stories always do—'once upon a time a lion journeyed across the Marehan Desert

in company with an ostrich, who improved the shining hour by imitating, so far as he could, the awesome roar of his companion. He tried it in a falsetto tremolo and all the intermediate stages, down to the deepest basso profundo, with no sort of success.

'How dare you attempt to roar like me!' said the King of Beasts contemptuously; 'you are not a lion.'

'I can kill game just as effectually, for all that,' retorted the bird, 'and with much less palaver.'

'I don't believe it!' growled the lion's offended majesty.

'Then I'll prove my words. Do you see those three zebras feeding towards us? Now, watch me; I'm worth watching.'

Spreading his wings like sails, he ran with the wind behind him right up to the striped creatures, and, letting drive with powerful legs at the nearest, kicked so violently, and with such accuracy of aim, that presently a well-grown zebra lay prostrate on the ground in its death agony. The others, wise animals, broke back and vanished on the horizon, with the astounding celerity known to all the jungle folk.

When the lion came up on the scene of action

the ostrich royally presented him with all the meat, juicy meat in such quantity that, in spite of his chagrin and annoyance, the great beast had not the strength to refuse it. His appetite was so shamelessly willing, his flesh so disgracefully weak! Of course, it is very small-minded of a lion to condescend to eat meat killed by a mere ostrich, but this particular specimen had no strong views on the subject. Food was food to him, however come by.

'Don't you eat meat, then?' queried the lion, in between mouthfuls.

'Not often,' replied the bird, who was busily bolting scraps of gravel and odd fragments of gum arabic fallen from the clefts of the adad trees.

In a flash it dawned on the lion that his acquaintance was minus teeth! What a chance and what an opportunity!

With a springing bound he was at the ostrich's neck, seeking to bite it through. A vigorous sideway kick felled him to the earth, for the gorged beast had not a tithe of his wonted agility, and the sinews of the bird were hard as wires. Not for nothing had he lived to be the oldest inhabitant of ostrich-land!

Once more the powerful legs got to work, like

steam-driven hammers, and lo! after a more energetic onslaught than ever, the lion collapsed to rise no more.

All the victor took from his treacherous companion was the subdued growling so much coveted, not his mane, nor his claws, nor his teeth, nor anything that was his, save the minor roar of the lion, and this the valiant bird has handed down through the centuries to all the ostrich tribe.

The lioness told this story to her cub because she thought he ought to know the ins-and-outs of lion history, even if it happened to be unpalatable, exactly as human children, with patriotic prickles on end, have, by the inexorable laws of the schoolroom, to uncover shrouded national skeletons best left to turn to dust.

The lions aren't proud of their ostrich story, any more than we are of our own Majubas.

She told him, too—saying that he could not learn this early enough—something of the most-to-be-feared enemies lions have to take into account, the Sahib Máros.

Sahib Máros, she said, always come with dread implements which speak death and desolation, and guided by the familiar two-legged traitorous brown beings who know—by some strange intuition—

whither the jungle people go, and why. Walk you never so warily, scheme you never so carefully, these all-understanding ones can read every sign-post of the wild. A twig, maybe, turned this way or that, gives a clue, leaves twisted awry, or, perchance, a little sand tumbled about which anon becomes a game-trail.

That is the nature of the African shikári, only the lioness did not know it. Argus-eyed, he spoors as no other man. He alone of all trackers can imagine game conditions which practically do not exist, and then, by some curious unexplainable feat of legerdemain, bring them to pass.

'Sahib! Máro! Máro!'* the brown one calls everlastingly. 'Sahib! Máro!' A strange name, and, apparently, an universal, but no stranger, or more universal, than the Sahib Máros themselves. 'And every one of them,' went on the lioness, all unconsciously quoting one of our greatest, 'is an extraordinary perversionist. When he wants to murder a lion he calls it "sport," and when a lion wants to murder him he calls it "ferocity."'

No—they had not always troubled the country.

* 'Sahib! shoot! shoot!' (Hindustani). From constant association with Anglo-Indians, and Indians themselves, Somalis have incorporated the words into their vernacular.

This scourge of Sahib Máros was of comparatively recent date. She was quite sure of that. It is not difficult—the life of a lion being of the length it is—to shake hands across the years, and in her luminous remembrance of her mother's mother, the lioness could not recall any mention of the coming of the devastators.

'Perhaps they will go away again soon,' said the little one hopefully. His mother shook her leonine head. She knew better. When the white man comes, he comes to stay.

Sometimes the Sahib Máros grow tall as the reed beds by the water holes; sometimes the reeds hide them, but always they differ from the brown human things who have for centuries shared the great waste places with the beasts, in that they are of a lighter colour and smell less pungently. They are not such good eating, either. For herself the lioness could not say, since she was yet strong and virile and able to slay more active spirits, but an old man-eater of her acquaintance had volunteered the information that to a real gourmet the flesh of a black man is as different from the white variety as a hyæna chop excels in flavour the wing of a mere tasteless guinea fowl. Which must be very different indeed.

When he was not more than a fortnight old the little one heard his mother roar for the first time. He lay rigid, transfixed with terror, thinking the sound came from the earth beneath, that the world was cracking into unfathomable engulfments which would presently swallow him and the chameleon who lay on a branch across the way, watching, watching with eternally wakeful eyes, and perhaps the weaver birds who had built overhead would go too.

The grand sonorous voice rang out again in a dozen gradations, beginning with a deep-toned moaning, eerie and indescribably awesome, rising, rising in volume into majestic even roars, repeated once, twice, thrice, which died away into muffled sighs like the mutterings of a brewing storm. Down the ages the same message is flung to the winds in every lion's roar, and if you have a smattering of Arabic, are psychic in the slightest degree, you can distinguish the words quite plainly.

'Ahna on ben el mera!' (I, and the son of woman!)

An Imperial pronouncement, if you come to think of it, reminiscent of the famous 'I and God' attributed to another Emperor.

The cub caught the words distinctly, and they

thrilled through his veins like a song. No creatures in all the wild were of account save two!

'Ahna on ben el mera!'

It was a great inheritance.

The more fear the cub showed the more his mother roared, 'blooding' him, as it were, with her tremendous voice. It is really doubtful whether you could ever raise some lions to courageous lionhood by any other method, for all are not equipped with the proverbial lion heart. There are so many types of lions—the bold, the cowardly, the aggressive, the retiring, the reckless, the wary, the straightforward, the sly. Some cubs are born courageous, others achieve that state, whilst many have courage forcibly thrust upon them. And of this latter army was our trembling little whelp.

However vexed she became, the lioness never snarled. In all his later life the cub never saw a lion snarl or snarled himself. Such puerilities are for lesser cats, not for mighty kings. In fact, the more enraged a lion becomes the less he snarls. The upper lip draws down, quite hiding the grim white teeth, conveying an expression of unutterable scorn and contempt. So, with mouth slightly open, an angry lion surveys an insult.

Terrible days were those when the great teeth began to climb through the red gums, hours of agony when the tiny one lay with his burning head on his mother's side, and wished himself in the Happy Hunting Grounds chasing immortal oryx and glorified gazelle. Carefully the lioness tended him, for the death roll of the whelps is very high during the dentition period, more particularly among the females, which makes it very splendid in later days for the fortunate survivors. In the lion world there are always enough husbands to go round, and a good few over. Different from the miserable working-overtime state of things existent with us human beings! Why can't our feminines toe the line more in teething, instead of the opposite being the case? What is Nature's reason for such provoking diverse freaks? She always has a reason.

At three months old the cub had a fine lot of teeth, and his mother left him more frequently, sometimes remaining away for hours at a stretch. The lion, too, on whom domesticity rampant soon palled, accompanied her on each hunting expedition. He lay up in the near vicinity, in a lair of his very own, and often through the great heat of the day, in between sleeps, the great cats would

call to one another in a peculiar lowing note, not loud but very penetrating.

The cub was rather afraid of his cumbrous father, who seemed so remote and austere compared with the lioness, who had not forgotten what it meant to be young. She could play and gambol when she liked almost as vigorously as her son himself.

Whilst his majestic front and solemn mien impressed his son with a sense of profound respect, Leo I. was not in reality a very brave lion nor a sententious. There were times when he thought himself both, and if these brief spasms had only lasted sufficiently long enough to enable him to convince his wife of his courage and finesse, the world would have gone very well then. Unfortunately, the lion cultivated a reserved hauteur and lofty repose—his mother had taught him that both were desirable qualities in a royal personage—and instead of persuading the lioness that these traits concealed an immense reserve of latent power, he merely gave her the idea that he was lazy.

Now the little one was promoted to a meat diet, scraps of all sorts, which the lioness tore up carefully into small pieces and the cub straightway bolted whole.

The days were very much alike just then. He

ate and slept and grew, and grew and slept and ate. Then came the great occasion when he saw something of the outside world for himself.

He was alone as the dawn broke, and an indefinable longing seized him to seek the unknown. He was so weary of the deep-set lair, tired of the selfsame trees, bored with the chameleon of the sleepless eyes. Perhaps, in the green outside—who knows?—he would find his mother.

So he stepped diffidently beyond the confines of all he had ever known, sniffing as he went in great deep inquiring sniffs. The air was so clear, and there was that in the touch of it which intoxicated and called and beckoned him on to the untried realms beyond. The lure of Little Voices was in his ears, chanting, chanting in murmurous insistency the siren song of the wild.

The scene around was of rare beauty. Outside of the oasis existed a dreary waste of sunburnt sand, hideous and monotonous; within its depths Titania had her bowers, Oberon his courts. In thorny thickets the durr grass grew high, and everywhere the deep lush undergrowth hid the trees to a height of several feet. Webs of Arachne's weaving made bars of silver gossamer

from aloe to mimosa and back again, and on the slender cable dewdrops glistened like fairy tears.

On went the little explorer, threading his way through the impeding brambles, his tubby body a-quiver with excitement. This, then, was the world wherein his mother hunted. It was a beauteous place.

The wait-a-bit thorn held him persuasively, and nothing but a toll levied on his khaki-coloured coat purchased freedom. He never felt the twinge. Did Columbus quail when the arrows of the Indians grazed his skin?

Fleet, shy guinea fowl sped at sight of him, raising their long necks and crying 'Kek! Kek! Kek!' as they darted hither and thither in distraught disarray. Doves—found all over Africa wherever there is a tree for them to rest upon—cooed amid the fantastic foliage of a guda tree, whose lowest branches were quite eighteen feet from the ground.

A whirr and a rush. Some small animal earning his breakfast!

Across a glade, devastated by the caterpillars, the tawny atom passed, not caring whither he went, until a prone bulk brought him up—the remains of a lesser koodoo, whose big ears had not

saved him. There was little left of him but his shoulders, and a graceful fringed neck and broad-arrowed nose—the lions had seen to that.

Naturalists have it that because this animal lives mostly in such thick cover, where quick hearing often means preservation, the ears have grown in accordance with necessities. It isn't true—always. Large ears in a moose—a bush-haunting creature—certainly make for a wondrous sense of sound, and are a device of Nature's own, too, for catching the voice of the charmer quickly in the mating season in a land where the cover is almost impenetrable. But large-eared antelopes aren't always jungle-keeping. The steinbuck of the open plain has colossal ears for the size of him; the duiker, too. And the gerenük genus weren't behind the door either when ears were apportioned.

The cub patronized the restaurant of the wild—there was enough left for a little one. Before he began his breakfast he brushed away countless gorged butterflies resting on the carcass with closed wings, hiding the glories of browns and purples, soft blues and flaming reds. Such wonderfully tinted insects, which fell fluttering to the ground before the careless paw, like crimson blossoms blown by the wind.

A thin brown tree-snake, with small, penetrating, cunning eyes, dropped from a low thorn bush almost at the cub's feet, and he drew back astonished. What a curious jungle resident—so slender, so lithe, so graceful. The lioness had said nothing about this little whip-like creature. Could it play? It looked agile. He touched it gently to see, but when the neck arched, and the flat cruel head swayed from side to side, something told him that this was not the companion he was seeking.

He was so exuberantly happy and so playful that he tried to gambol with his own shadow as it lay on the sunlit sand. There were drawbacks to being an only child—the cub had long since realized that. What would he not give for a playmate of his own age! His mother couldn't play properly. She thought she could, and tried valiantly, but what a make-believe it was!

He would walk s edately for a few paces, and then give a little sideway spring, and, impelled by the sheer joy of being alive, roll over and over; up again, to rush at top speed round and round after his own tail.

Down a decided game trail the little lion walked serenely. He had fathomed the secret of how to

tread on the dry twigs so that they did not go off with betraying cracks. Only once in a long while did he make any sound whatever. He was learning many things.

The quaintest of lizards blocked the way. It had an outspread tail as big as itself, and when the cub batted it out of his path, instead of stepping over it as his mother would have done, the small reptile cried for all the world like a lion whelp, so that the explorer was startled, and wondered whether he had somehow ill-treated a relation.

Then, of a sudden, the oasis ended in a waste of sand, dotted here and there with branching guda trees.

The cub stood on the verge of the world and looked across the vastness to the horizon, where moving groups of antelope fed, and sand grouse, in the nearer distance, peacocked to the water holes. High in the blue ether a vulture sailed, a mysterious aloof spirit, watching, watching, eternally watching.

Up wind the harsh music of a pack of wild dogs rang on the silence—the weird 'Kak-Kak-Kak!' of the very young mingling with the deeper 'Hoo-Hoo!' of veteran leaders, and at the double the yellowish horde passed in hot pursuit of a disabled

buck, ears cocked, large tails streaming in the wind. Strange, high-shouldered, furtive brutes, falling away to nothing behind. Instinctively the cub shrank back until his khaki coat blended with the grass. He would not meet those fearsome creatures for anything, or have them spy him out. Why had not his mother black-listed such evil spirits? 'You need fear no creatures of the wild,' she had said loftily, 'and all are eatable, even the prickly wart-hog.'

But even as she said it she counselled leaving severely alone all rhinos and hippopotami, unless—rare chance!—it was possible to pull down a young beast wandering at a safe distance from its mother. The latter herself was only assailable by a concerted attack, and wise lions never mixed themselves up in such forays.

Elephants do not come within the ken of Somali lions nowadays. Time was when great herds roamed the Golis valleys, and until fairly recently the Gadabursi country was the haunt of the big pachyderms. Alas! Somaliland will know them no more.

A moaning bellow sobbed over the plain—some wild thing dying, and dying hard.

In the jungle all is one long struggle for survival,

and death comes in cruellest form. No excuses are made, none wanted. Wild beasts kill to live, just as we human beings kill each other every day, only in the place which we for want of a better name call 'civilization' we do the butcher work more scientifically, more delicately.

He could never go back, he thought, to his pent-house in the oasis. It was not altogether an attractive resting-place, and sheltered many small harmful things as well as harmless, betwixt which only the eye of a magician could tell the difference. Centipedes, scorpions, wasps, fire-ants, also a small but persevering leech, and the never, never failing, all-pervading mosquito.

He would hunt for himself now. Was he not three months old—prodigious age! and as big again as he was at birth? What had he found that had so changed the face of all things, made him so courageous, so self-supporting? And the wind, driving the sand in scorching blast, gave the answer, 'The Freedom of the Wild!'

A quick pad, pad behind him, and his heart beat faster. Perhaps he would wait awhile before he tried living alone. The world was a dreadfully large place, far, far bigger than he had thought. *How would it look o' nights?*

The lioness did not stay to tell him. She picked him up in her strong white razor teeth, which yet could sheath their edge in a velvet grip, and carried him off, ignominiously, by his neck, with paws trailing, back to the lair in the oasis, where she laid him down exhausted.

'Lion, wait a little longer, till your little legs are stronger,' she said in effect, tenderly.

Only the cub did not hear her. He was asleep.

CHAPTER II

CAPTURE AND RESCUE

'If one should be a prey, how much the better
To fall before the lion than the wolf!'

Twelfth Night.

'JOLLY little beggar!' said a mellifluous voice from the direction of the weavers' nests. 'Quick now, Mohammed! Wrap him up.'

The cub cried out as they dragged him from the recess beneath the thorns by protesting feet, but in an instant he was silenced in the tight, smothering folds of an all-enveloper, Mohammed's Sunday-go-to-meeting spare khaili tobe, a none too savoury garment either, as the cub realized very soon. He was lifted, upside down, too, and carried off in his swaddling clothes, fighting and spitting like the cat he was.

He knew he was a prisoner!

Never again would he lie beside his beautiful lithe mother in the shimmer of noon-day, listening to the drowsy hum of myriad bees, or hear her soft

lagging pad, pad, as she came back to him from the dark realms of the night. The chameleon, too—would he wonder where the little yellow one had gone? It was cruel, cruel! He tried to fight, to free himself, but strong arms gripped him tight, the battle was unequal. 'Twas useless.

Suddenly, with a plunge of his heart, the cub heard something so wonderful, so altogether unexpected, that his courage leapt up again, and he bit and scratched and tore and cried.

Through his darkness a deep-toned call-note sounded—how well he knew it! A tender note, which had nothing of a roar in it, just an infinitely gentle concentrated purr.

'Be of good cheer,' it seemed to say; 'I am here.'

'Sahib! Máro! Máro!'

Next instant the cub was dashed heavily to the ground, and, rolling over, he freed himself from his cumbrous trappings and lay panting on the sandy, grass-tufted waste. Before he had time to gather his scattered wits a splitting bang rent the air.

The stage was set for a drama.

Against a background of armo creeper stood a Sahib Máro, white as the butterflies who flickered across the grass. He was wrestling with his rifle,

preparatory to firing again, hurriedly, anxiously, feverishly—something was wrong—the cartridge would not rise into the magazine. A small bit of grit had got into the breech, and jammed the bolt action. And all the while, at sixty paces off, the lioness watched him, like some ruthless avenger, her head low between her massive shoulders, ears laid back, tail swishing rather slowly from side to side in a rippling movement—a beautiful picture of repressed savage power.

He was a brave Sahib Máro among all Sahib Máros—the cub felt quite sure of that, for there was a pitiless blaze in the amber-yellow eyes of the lioness which made even her son's heart quail. They were unforgetable—those terrible eyes! For many nights afterwards the little one saw them flaming with a hatred and fury unutterable, and when he saw he whimpered aloud.

The Sahib Máro neither blenched nor ran away. He looked round for Mohammed, but the treacherous shikári—a most curious anomaly, a Somali coward—was nowhere to be seen. In mute haste he shook his rifle roughly, fumbled again.

At that instant the lioness threw out her tail straight and stiff, and charged, not in springing bounds, but low to earth, like a dog.

Just how she seized the Sahib Máro the cub could not tell. It seemed to him, watching, that the weight of her bore the victim to the earth. But she knew—none so well—the most vital parts.

Prone and still among the durr grass tufts, the Sahib Máro lay extended, his white face to the sun, his brain pierced by the great canine teeth of the beast, who rested on the sand growling, growling, as a lesser cat triumphs at the death of a mouse.

The cub crept up, but his mother growled so fiercely and looked so terrible that he shrank away. The lust of blood was on her—she did not know her own.

For a short space the tawny lioness remained couched on her massive arms, growling still, and singing to herself. Then she rose and sniffed her victim all over, but never touched him.

Of a sudden she raised her head and with concentrated gaze listened, listened intently, standing as though carved in stone, save for the irrepressible twitching of her tail. How beautiful she was! In the cub's eyes the most wondrous beast ever he looked on.

He, too, caught the sound of strange murmurous rustlings, and a pungent smell, like nothing he had ever known before, tainted the air.

Crack! Crack! The sand spurted up in tricky darts, not the work of the sportive crickets, whose gambols the cub knew very well. This was a deadly business, a mysterious something to be greatly feared.

With a 'whuff' the lioness flung herself towards her son as though she meant to crush the very life out of his small body, and he, terrified, fled before the fierceness of her onslaught to the thick cover, where, in the artfulness of her life-saving device, she most longed to drive him. He panted along —he was so podgy yet and weighty on his legs— through the thorn and interlacing khansa scrub, and close on his heels followed the lioness, purring encouragement now, urging the little creature forward.

She never looked behind—like Lot's wife. She was too wise for that. And her discretion had a valour of its own, for the truest valour is always mixed with the quality of circumspection. No sensibly brought up beast blindly overlooks a crushing danger.

Livingstone had a supreme contempt for lions— no man since his day has felt so little fear of the King of Beasts. Perhaps Allah made a Daniel of him, or perhaps a hunted lioness ran before the

missionary when by all the laws of lions, as recounted by fable and tradition, she should have remained to be killed.

It is not strange that a wild creature with its inborn fear of man should try for safety—it does not argue poltroonery at all. Nobody who has ever stood before a lion battling for its life speaks lightly of its courage.

In open country the man with the gun has the advantage, and your wise lion knows it. In thick cover the game lies with the animal, and he knows that, too. Give me the beast who ever weighs the chances, and then, with that high quality of bravery which distinguishes the courage of the wise from the hardiness of the rash, chooses the course best suited to the end in view.

Presently the sandy glade wherein the great tragedy had been enacted was full of white-robed brown men, some of them barefooted, whilst others wore curious sandals which turned up prow-like at the toe, upon which they frequently rested the handles of their spears.

'Sahib!' each man called in every tone, 'Sahib!'

Stooping, Mohammed placed his hand upon the lion track, measuring the pugs with practised skill.

His outspread fingers could not encompass the larger imprints, they were those of too big a beast. Student of the wilderness as he was, he could easily piece together each step of the whole fatality by merely looking at the record writ in the tossed-up sand. He saw just whereabouts the lioness took off for her great charge, knew that the Sahib's only shot had missed, and gauged exactly where the animals, big and little, fled to cover—they were hurrying fast then. The lion, being a cat, has retractile claws, and when he walks the pugs are even and rounded. The instant he increases his pace and runs, the nail marks show, and the sand furs up slightly under the press of the pad.

'Kismet! It is the will of Allah!' said the big shikári, looking down at the prostrate form of his master, and feeling no insatiate desire to wreak vengeance. The jungle was thick, the lioness angry, the Sahib's belongings were there for the dividing, and the battle for possession is everywhere to the strong. The latest thing in rifles is not to be had in Somaliland for the taking, every day of the week!

The cub tried to hurry—never had he taken such a journey, never did he think to take such another! Fast as he went, he did not press forward quickly

enough to please his mother, who drove him before her with angry voice. At last her quick senses told her they were not followed, and she slackened the pace.

Near the old home the lion waited their coming, drowsing by a thorn bush. What an odd-looking beast! the cub thought for the fiftieth time. So much bigger than the lioness, so massive in front, and behind—what a falling off was there! The finest lions, however magnificent and massive in the fore, peter out considerably in the hind-quarters, but the cub had not seen enough of his kind to understand this. He rather suspected his parent of deformity, for in the lioness the noticeable peculiarity was not so strongly marked.

A fair, but not profuse, mane was one of the lion's many handsome features. It was blackish at the tips, and similarly-tinted tufts of hair adorned his elbows and flanks. A most unusual thing in Somali lions, for hair goes by climate and not by favour. Few wild lions acquire that wealth of mane which we admire so much in the great cats of the Zoo. The strenuous life, and the burden and heat of the day, and the wait-a-bit thorns play the part of hair-cutter.

Consulting together, standing shoulder to

shoulder, the lions reviewed the situation, whilst the cub lay down to doze. Nor for long, however. Ruthlessly his parents pressed forward in single file, the lioness leading, the lion in the rear, the baby between. In the lion world the lioness always walks first, sets the pace, gives the word to halt, takes precedence in roaring duets, often directs the stalk—a very advanced feminine, indeed! But —a big But—when danger threatens, the male makes the most of this self-reliance and, taking the shortest route to safety, coolly leaves madam to see after herself.

The little one was hard driven to keep up with the hurrying beasts, for although the most-used pace of full-grown lions is a walk, it is, by reason of their length of body, a walk indeed! Later in life he thought nothing of doing a forty-mile trek in a single night.

Sometimes the cats trotted, and ere many days had passed they showed their offspring what galloping meant. Not galloping as we understand the word, but a series of springing bounds, which, for a short distance, was very fast indeed.

From the oasis the lions emerged on a great open plain, or "bun," as the Somalis call such places, where the new grass rolled like a green ocean to

the horizon and game fed in regiments. Aoul, in large herds, found pasturage here, oryx with their tapering horns, and hartebeest, a little resembling well-kept sea-side donkeys, stood about in twos and threes. The sun had set superbly, and in its glorious glow the three lions, the little one completely exhausted and unable to move farther, lay down in the grass to watch and wait.

As it grew darker the male crept below the wind towards a grazing hartebeest, and, sinuous as a snake, crouched until the antelope should feed right on to him. It didn't matter a scrap that the moon had not yet risen, the lion could kill just as effectively as though he had a flood of light to guide him. Like the rest of the carnivores, he depended much more on his marvellous sense of smell than on his good eyesight. All the jungle people, flesh and grass-eating, trust to their noses before their eyes. The lion knew, too, so old was he in practice, exactly what animal he was stalking. Darkness made no difference to him. The full-grown hartebeest has an unmistakable and virile smell, as indeed have all animals, the scent of each genus being peculiar and defined.

Up wind came the heedless quarry, feeding slowly right on to the waiting lion.

It was over in a moment. A flash of cloudy yellow, and the big cat was on his victim. He killed quite differently from the bold, free, sweeping stroke of a tiger. Lions are most cat-like in their methods, more cat-like than all the cats, and snatch their victims with a curiously furtive plucking movement.

He seized the hartebeest's shrinking muzzle with an iron left paw, and, gripping the top of the sleek brown shoulder with the right, held on grimly until the cruel talons sank deep, deep into the yielding flesh. Poor doomed antelope! He tried to back and sidle from the demon clutch. Useless! The strength of his opponent was overwhelming, and during the short struggle the lion's hind-feet never left the ground, neither did he appreciably change his first position. A mad plunge forward gave the great cat his opportunity, and with the silent vampire at his throat, the stricken hartebeest fell heavily forward, breaking his neck in the crash.

Quite a young lion can successfully throw a hartebeest if he gets the chance, but, since he is the quickest goer in the antelope world, hartebeest chops figure more rarely than most on King Leo's menu.

Then the lioness gave tongue, almost as though she claimed a share in the victory, and the lion

answered, and they roared in unison until the nearest Somalis—a few Mijertain shepherds following the new grass—lying under their primitive skin tents set within the strong thorn zareba which had been mended up and occupied by the nomads year after year, called on Allah to preserve them, and grant the 'libbah'—the synonym for lion in the Somali vernacular—that good hunting which alone would keep him off the flocks.

All jungle Somalis can tell from the roar of a lion whether he is hungry or sated. They listen critically and say: 'His voice is thick; he will not hunt to-night.' 'His voice is loud and harsh; we must keep good watch.'

They generally gauge the situation correctly. Not odd, perhaps, when you remember that on the far-flung frontier lines of the Ogaden and beyond, the natives share the face of their land, with all its manifold interests, its hunts, and its water holes, with the lions. They live and die in touch with each other.

After the roaring ceased there was no sound at all save for the low shiver of the plumed grasses as the wandering night wind swept across the open plain. The moon ascended through scattered clouds, and in her silver radiance the rolling country looked

more than ever like an endless ocean on which little play ships rode at anchor, their prows all turned one way in mathematical precision, their masts silhouetted bare and stark against the night sky—oryx, feeding up wind in the midst of the grass, or standing, drowsily, with horns upraised.

In old fables the father lion invariably behaves in the most magnanimous and most unmasculinely unselfish manner, after a successful kill, and stands back, however hungry he may be, the while his family have first go-in and consume all the best of the meat. As a matter of fact, the male beast, in the first flush of victory, more often than not ferociously beats off all would-be diners until he himself has bolted the pick of the carcass. Of this variety of paterfamilias was Leo I. Leo II. was so wearied—in ordinary circumstances he would never have had such a trek forced on him at his age—that he did not press his claims at all, and lay watching the scene with the inquisitive interest of the very young.

The lioness knew better than to approach too near to the dead hartebeest. She kept rising to her feet eagerly in her difficult-to-repress excitement, and creeping forward a pace or two. But she kept her distance.

The lion lost no time in getting to work. He tore open his victim's flank as though it were tissue paper, and then with keen razor claws eviscerated the carcass deftly and skilfully. The cub watched the procedure with breathless amaze, and his admiration for his father increased by leaps and bounds. How clever he was! A real artist in butchery—and art of any kind is effective.

Next, the lion dragged the entire paunch to a little distance, where he left it, after half burying it in sand quickly scratched together. Carrion-feeder though he might be, in the face of plenty he was a gourmet.

He bolted whole the *bonnes bouches* of the antelope—the heart, the liver, etc.—and then ravenously swallowed, skin and all, huge lumps of flesh from the thighs. At this juncture the lioness thought it safe to approach. None too soon if she was hungry.

Over the discarded refuse jackals and hyænas, sprung from nowhere, wrangled and coughed and gurgled and laughed. Soon a big, venturesome spotted brute, standing perhaps two and a half feet high at the shoulder, attempted to loot a toothsome severed limb, sneaking dangerously close to the lioness. In an instant she was on him, and,

bowling the unkempt thing on to his side, held him, helpless as a puppy, in the vice-like grip of her paws. So adroit was her method that, though the prisoner snarled and yapped viciously, he could not use his fangs. For a minute or two she held him thus, as though to emphasize her power and dexterity; then, with a calm malignancy of purpose which the cub never forgot, bit off each foot in turn just below the knee-joint, and, casting aside the shrieking, mutilated beast, proceeded with her mighty supper.

On silent wing a marabou stork arrived and took up his position at a safe distance. What a mammoth bird, the cub thought! His extended wings were as long as the lioness from nose to tail. In ones and twos the vultures came, leaving their roosts in the guda trees of the oasis and settling down on the sand to sleep again. These carrion feeders will not eat at night. There they stood patiently, silent sentinels, waiting for the dawn.

When at last she remembered his existence, the sated lioness collected the crumbs from the rich man's table and took them to the cub. He ate them gratefully, thumping his little tail with pleasure on the sand. And then, because she knew he was incapable of journeying farther, the beauti-

ful creature lifted her son in her jaws as easily as a cat carries a kitten and turned back into the wilderness of cover behind. Here the radiant moon could not penetrate. The still deeps loomed black as Erebus, but the lioness threaded her way through without the slightest difficulty, scarce displacing a twig or making one false step. When the cub would know how it was that eyes could penetrate such intense gloom, she answered that she was not relying on her sight, but on the delicately perceptive nerves of the whiskers which fringed her short muzzle. Just for a few paces his mother set the young one down in order that he might find out for himself what marvellous night-guides lion-whiskers are, better than the best lamp ever invented, but after he had stubbed his foot against a broken root, and run into some hard substance which hurt his head badly, to say nothing of his *amour propre*, he decided that he didn't know enough about the game as yet. Abashed and discomfited, he submitted readily to being hoisted aloft once more, with ' Put not your trust in whiskers ' writ large all over him.

CHAPTER III

YOUTHFUL EXPERIENCES

'A hollow burst of bellowing,
Like bulls, or rather lions.'
The Tempest.

'Against the lion's armed jaws.'
1 *King Henry IV.*

THE cub was too worn out to sleep, and throughout the night lions roared on every side. With the young grass a-blowing and a-growing, and trees clothing themselves anew in robes of emerald, the potent magic of the season cast its spell over the beasts, got into their heads, and drove them to frenzy.

'Lovers say, the heart has treble wrong
When it is barr'd the aidance of the tongue.'

And that's why the lions roar so continuously in the spring-time. During the sweltering Somali summers the sonorous voices are stilled.

The lioness slept on heavily to long past dawn,

but the little beast was very wide awake indeed and weary of inaction. He chased an early purple Emperor from leaf to leaf, and watched a covey of honey-gathering sun-birds, with the colour of the morning on their wings, dipping their curved beaks into the crimson blossoms of a bright-leaved shrub. Then he lay on his back and gambolled with the clouds of bright-winged ephemerids who clustered round his paws, attracted by the natural oil on them.

Playing with his toes kept him amused for a while. His fore-feet had five and the hind but four, and the innermost toe on the fore was placed so much higher than the others that it was of no earthly use to him in walking. His mother ought to have seen to this! There was certainly a toe missing on each hind-foot. He liked the soft, separate cushions on the under surface, and the big pad they surrounded. There, again, the numbers were unequal. It was too bad!

He played at sheathing his claws, and bending his paw sharply in order to pull down the terminal joints and expose the sharp, curved talons again.

Suddenly a furtive rustle gave him pause, and the whelp rushed back to his mother and snuggled against her gently-heaving side.

A fawn-coloured slender foot pressed down the undergrowth ten yards off, its owner hidden in the thick khansa cover. It did not belong to a lion, the cub knew that quite well, because the unsheathed claws were not retractile like his own, but rested outstretched on the sand. Then—what a cunning face peered at him from the maze of green! Small, scarred, penetrating, and infinitely wise-looking, and the worn teeth looked cruel as the unknown gave a snarling greeting.

Silently the phantom passed, and through a break in the density ahead the young lion saw that his visitor was a biggish creature, and a cat, in spite of his claws, like himself.

Later our hero met the hunting leopard everywhere, for all kinds of cover are alike to him—forests, plains, low hills, roads, jungle paths.

The harsh grating cough of the unwanted caller, as it ran nose to the trail of some temporarily lost quarry, wakened the lioness. She rose, stretching herself, and yawning. She was thirsty, and must drink.

Few things on earth are more delusive to man or beast than Somali wells, and, in any case, the deep places cut through solid rock by hewers centuries dead, or, more often, through sun-baked

red earth, are much too deep for wild creatures to negotiate. Water sometimes lodges in the hand-hollowed troughs where the camels are watered alongside the wells, and to these thirsty lions repair, often to meet with disappointment, which means a further trek to oozy water holes. Clear water, glistening bright, is only for those home-keeping beasts who make their permanent homes in the few and far-between desert oases, and even these beautiful little pools, with the exquisite surrounding riot of aloes and feathery plants, intersected by myriad game trails, get perilously low between the rains.

The lioness turned towards a distant pool in the oasis, and the cub followed. His father was still asleep in the long grass, and all that could be seen of him was the tuft at the end of his tail. The cub would have liked to play with it. The little horny bit—which the Somalis say lions use as a goad wherewith to lash themselves to fury—in the centre of the hair had such endless possibilities. But—'Let sleeping lions lie' is one of the proverbs of cat-land.

Stepping in the spoor of his mother so far as he could stride, the cub managed the thick brushwood easily. All was silent now—the jungle slept in

the heat of the morning sun, and if it had not been for the flies which unceasingly worried his ears, the little one would have been intensely happy. He loved this green oasis. The burnt plains of the great world outside had no such subtle charms to offer. This in his ignorance, for he knew them not at all.

In a marshy tract he saw spoor of much game, and a maze of the largest tracks he had ever seen. But of the big creature who had passed this way there was no evidence, beyond its giant footprints. A rhinoceros causes but little havoc to the thorn bushes as he travels. Unlike the elephant, he does not eat and smash down as he goes. He waits until he reaches some cherished feeding-ground.

The scattered remains of a dead lion poisoned the air in odoriferous whiffs. In such thick underbrush the carcass was safe from the vultures, but the wild dogs had been at him, and there was little left to tell of past sovereignty.

The lions followed a wide track made by tortoises innumerable, who had marched in solid phalanx, crushing all before them, to the water, these many years. And in the forest pool, big as a bath and as shallow, three tortoises were swim-

ming. They drew in their ugly, serpent-like heads beneath their armour-plated residences, and peered from under the flat yellow carapaces at the lioness lying down on her breast, as she lapped the water thirstily, stopping in between whiles to draw breath.

The cub pushed his nose into the cool shallows, and breathed on the water in inquiring sniffs. Then he drank, too, amateurishly, with most of the liquid trickling out of the gaping sides of his jaws.

Then onwards, with no definite purpose that the cub could divine, until they came to an open space which looked strangely familiar, and there was that in the air of it which chilled and frightened. Dread memories stirred in the little lion's mind; they were dreams, perhaps—bad ones. Everywhere, in the hollows of the thorns, under the grass tufts, beside the mimosa bushes, beneath the armo creeper, he saw fiery yellow implacable eyes, gleaming stronger than the sun itself.

Then he remembered!

It was the spot whereon his mother had slain the Sahib Máro, and to it she had purposely returned, drawn thither by promptings the cub could not fathom. Was she really hungry, after the huge

banquet of the night before? It seemed impossible.

The great cat sniffed the place all over, crossing and recrossing it many times, with slow feline step. Sometimes she nosed into the sand, and scratched furtively. All signs of the battle had been eliminated by the tramping to and fro of human feet.

In the centre, a little way from the spot where the Sahib Máro had fallen, was the new-made grave of a great Chief, piled high with stones and brushwood to keep off preying enemies. There were the prescribed amount of broken harns, or native water casks, piled on the apex, and the decorative heap of horns, koodoo and oryx, hartebeest and aoul, without which no head-man is honourably interred.

Slowly the lions stalked on to the northern verge of the oasis, where the arid-stretching plain was broken by numberless reddish ant-hills, shaped for all the world like hartebeests, and looking exactly like them in the sunshine. The lioness knew better. Mere outline did not deceive her. By some distant wells, limned clear in the bright light, a few Midgan hunters rested beside a fire over which they were roasting scraps of meat, and

a few savage dogs wrangled and fought over remnants of skin.

The lioness sank shoulder deep in the density, and the cub copied her, until only their eyes showed above the cover line. Old lions know the ways of the Midgans quite well, for they are everywhere, in small companies, these romantic outcast people, who call no karia home, and sleep as the beasts, with the sky for covering and the sand for bed.

The lioness could see the figures quite distinctly, even at that distance, and though they were of much the same colour as the gold-red sand. Midgans do not wear the Cæsar-like imposing robe of the average Somali, which is a long piece of white sheeting put on according to the taste, original, artistic, or otherwise, of the wearer, but indescribable rags, torn to ribbons. Across their bare shoulders they carry quivers full of poisoned arrows. Strange, primitive people, the most primitive in all Somaliland. They have no Chiefs, or even Spokesmen, unless you count the most conversational member of each nomadic band, who gains his pride of place by right of loquacity alone. Antelopes are hunted for food, by means of the fierce, trained dogs, and lions for their hides, which

are bartered with the nearest tribal head-man, who loves to decorate his steed round the neck with a frill of lion's mane. Very hot and uncomfortable for the pony, but effective and circus-like from the rider's point of view.

Perhaps the lioness was thinking of such things as she turned her face to the wilderness again. She looked sombre and melancholy enough for anything, her son thought, and she walked him too far, he said to himself crossly.

Crushing through a rock-strewn citadel, overgrown with a tangle of luxuriant vegetation, the strong strange smell which hangs about the lair of all the carnivores met them. A mangy, toothless lioness, cramped with age, raised herself and gave greeting. She was practically devoid of hair, and her piteous eyes shone with the silver-grey light of on-coming blindness. Her mate—faithless Lothario—drowsing in a reedy hollow, threw sleep to the winds and followed the desert queen stealthily. No wonder his allegiance tottered! Nature's bribes are very many in the jungle, and as she gives she takes. On every side she scatters an inexhaustible supply of beauties, surprises, vagaries, glories, fertilities, miracles, splendours, and contrasts them with her cruelties, changes, frailties, counterfeits, feeblenesses.

And a lavish planet reigned when our lioness was born!

All the way home this strange lion followed them, and all the way the lioness, with true feminine artfulness, affected to take no interest in her admirer, thereby spurring his ardour to fever-heat. He was masculine to his claw-tips, for all masculinity wants, the world over, is that, and that only, which is denied him.

When they came within the vicinity of the cub's father, the lioness dropped her air of indifference and began to cajole and lure her suitor into the presence. But he was pretty long in the tooth, that lion, and was not born yesterday. Thoughts of his ancient wife stirred in his abandoned soul. He turned tail, and fled from Circe, back to grim Medusa.

The tradition that a lion mates for life was not for long an illusion of the cub's. He soon understood that, even if male lions were the most faithful beasts in the world, the choice did not rest so much in the force of their affections as in their power to keep off predatory suitors, and their eyes on the fickle wives, 'Until another lion doth us part' being the form of the lion marriage service.

Our lioness tried to inveigle every male within

calling distance. She roared incessantly, and, hearing ready answers on all sides, roared again. By every feminine artifice she spurred her lord to furies of jealousy, and seemed indeed wilfully to precipitate these battle courtships from sheer unrestrained devilry.

The cub never forgot one Homeric encounter, waged in a moonlit glade where the three cats had been crouching by a game trail for hours, waiting for thirsty antelope which never came.

On the silence came the near challenge of a lion, and, quitting her place, the lioness answered with all the power of her lungs. Again she roared, and always her knight replied, as a true knight should do, with beseeming chivalry.

In another moment she was off on the line of sound, creeping through the grass like a snake, a-quiver with interest, her lord forgotten.

It came as a shock to the young lion to realize that his mother was a mere wanton. Were all feminines like that? he wondered. He had watched the herds of aoul on the open bun and seen the tactics there!

Only the other day, when he had chided his mother for encouraging the well-grown lion who had followed them from the edge of the oasis, she

had silenced her mentor with a sophistry as sound as it was subtle.

'Your father is getting old,' she said. 'I must keep my eyes open for a mate who will rid me of these troublesome younger lions, who fight for my favours and worry me with their attentions. What else should a lioness do?'

Coming events cast their shadows before. Years afterwards the cub remembered his mother's words.

Savagely the old lion followed his faithless wife, and in fractious, rumbling growls showed the measure of his discontent. Then he roared magnificently, and as the clarion notes rang through the stillness a shadowy outline jumped to attention in an embrasure of aloe trees, not fifty paces away. His voice was tremendous, too, and shook the echoes to their depths.

The lioness crouched on the ground and purred in a soft continuous drone, until the cub felt the incense of the luring hum fill his brain with an intoxication altogether unexplainable. He felt heroic! If he were big enough he, too, would fight the interloper, that serpent in the Eden—fight until he killed him, just as his father was preparing to do.

The sight of his mate couching on her great arms, and slashing her tail from side to side

pleasurably, as she purred her wanton welcome, turned the old lion Berserk. He scarce waited to spring off, rather he seemed to fly to the encounter, which his enemy met with an iron front. There was no shrinking away, no shirking of the dread business, the love-smoke was in their eyes.

All through the fierce contest, full of sound and fury, the hind-feet of both lions hugged the ground as they tore desperately with the razor talons of the fore. The great canine teeth tore each other's flesh until it hung in ribbons from the taut shoulders. Sometimes they slackened their grip in order to close the tighter. Fitful cries told their sufferings, and they drew breath in great sobs. Little by little the great issue loomed, and life, because it was slipping from their grip, seemed more to be desired than love itself.

For a few seconds longer it was impossible to judge which of the panting, foam-flecked warriors was the stronger, but at last the interloper began to show signs of tremendous stress, and the greater weight of his adversary told heavily. No longer could the lesser beast retaliate bite for bite, scratch for scratch—his hour was almost come. Exhausted, beaten, dying though he was, he yet contrived a slashing blow which laid open his enemy's shoulder

to the bone—a yawning gap! It was an expiring effort. As it was delivered the poor beast tottered and nearly fell. Like lightning the bigger cat, taking advantage of the on-coming weakness of his foe, gripped him firmly by the throat as a terrier would a rat, and choked the life out of him.

The lioness advanced cautiously, sniffed around what was left of her late admirer, lying in a huddled heap on the tossed-up sand, 'stained with the blood of those brave combatants,' and then turned to her wounded hero, purring loudly the while. She licked his hurts, and rubbed her beautiful head against his dripping mane, crowning him with the laurels of lion-land.

CHAPTER IV

EARLY TRAINING: DEATH OF FATHER LION

'Methought he bore him in the thickest troop
As doth a lion in a herd of neat.'

3 King Henry VI.

'The lion, dying, thrusteth forth his paw.'

King Richard II.

Whilst the old lion lay up and nursed his wounds —he was a very sick beast indeed—the lioness taught the cub the A B C of the hunter's trade. He was over five months old now, and could follow anywhere at an average pace. Of course, he was far too small and inexperienced as yet to kill so much as a rabbit for himself, but he crept up close o' nights to the vast herds of aoul, most easily seen of gazelle, and practised lying silent as death alongside his mother in the waving grass until an animal should feed on to them, and the lioness accounted for it. And one evening—oh, wondrous occasion! —the little cat was sent round the game in order

that he might drive them down towards the waiting Nemesis. They were shy as hawks that night, and kept well in the centre of the bun, where it was hard to stalk them.

It was a great adventure. The young lion streaked off in the half light, full of pride in his commission, and kept on the edge of the wide pasturage which ended as abruptly as does the planted corn in England. It is not everywhere on desert wastes that fine herbage grows, even in the spring. Sometimes he curved into the emerald sea if he thought himself observed, and once a cow oryx, big as a pony, passed him close. The cub marked the never-ceasing twitch and nervous movement of the sensitive, dilating nostrils, as the antelope felt the wind for any sign of threatening danger. He lay very low indeed. Had not his mother warned him of the strength and power of those rapier horns?

It took him a long time to work round to the exact position, and it was of such supreme importance that it should be exact: 'The little more, and oh, how much it is! the little less, and oh, what worlds away!'

Unless the gazelle broke cover just where the lioness had planned, the stalk must fail signally.

One injudicious movement, and the creatures would turn off in the opposite direction. He must be careful. His mother's anger was a most unpleasant thing to face.

Now and again a grey-brown dik-dik popped up almost at his feet, with the suddenness of the gophers on the Canadian prairies. The cub thought it would be the simplest thing in the world to kill one of these infinitesimal creatures—the smallest variety of buck known—but it was hardly the moment to try conclusions. He had to use his head, not his claws.

Two large striped hyænas, magnificent beasts, yellow-grey, with black bars across their shoulders, like harness, beautiful manes, and bushy tails, loped by, intent on some serious business, and after them, a long way after, moved a crippled brother, going painfully on four stumps. They were only stumps: the hyæna had no feet at all. The cub saw that quite distinctly. And yet the cumbersome creature kept his balance, though the length of each mutilated leg was different, and he lurched forward at every step.

It was the self-same poacher whose theft the lioness had punished so heavily.

Nature had not allowed this atom to perish.

Why? Ah, a wiser than the cub might fail at answering that. Such an one would say, perhaps: 'Nature is a thrifty Power—she never wastes, she never annihilates utterly; she keeps all things in reserve and adds to everything.'

Strange, that of all the numberless lives of which the grim wild takes daily toll, this *one* was spared to exist and suffer on! Was it stronger than its fellows? Had it nine chances like the cats, or did it

> 'Hold a rank,
> Important in the plan of Him who framed
> This scale of beings; hold a rank which, lost,
> Would break the chain, and leave behind a gap
> Which Nature's self would rue?'

The grass simply swarmed with animated creatures. All in herds, each bossed by a war-like old buck, who vigilantly saw that his harem kept a fair distance from the outskirts of the rival band.

You never find aoul in jungle country. They love the grassy plateaux and flat, bush-grown wastes, and live and die in the open.

Then the little lion prepared for action.

The aoul fed on, calmly, uninterestedly, out in the middle of the bun. They had sentinels of sorts, careless animals, not always to be found at

their posts. The grass tempted them and they did eat.

He strode into the green depths, and bounded along in the quaintest of jerks, sinking deep in between jumps. Sometimes he was totally submerged, and could see nothing at all, and this was intensely vexing, for he wanted, cat-like, to observe the impression he made when his quarry realized the fearsome creature with whom they had to deal.

At last—a sandy bit of clear ground, rising slightly above the plain level, and he stood on the summit, tense and rigid, waiting, waiting, with spasms of excitement tingling up and down his spine, for all that his mother had told him would surely happen if he conducted the stalk properly. He watched carefully, and at first the nearest herd took no heed of his dread presence at all. He might have been a nomadic sheep for all the interest they had in him.

It was a weird, scenic moment, the miniature lion standing there in his baby majesty, the perfection of royal grace; the curiously outlined frames of the feeding gazelle, moving like phantoms through the grass; the witchery of the silent night, broken by the cry of a belated night bird at the wells—*Hua! Hua!* in sad, forlorn note; the

sable-robed shadows drawing about the eerie spaces; the sigh of the desert wind with the sting of the sand in its breath; and the high arch of the purple-blue sky, dotted with stars, over all.

Then, of a sudden, knowledge of something untoward struck the nearest buck, and by the wondrous telepathy of the wild, tremors of alarm shook the herds simultaneously. The wind carried the dread lion-scent to myriad sniffing nostrils, and with a plunge and a sweep the terrified gazelle fled pell-mell through the grass—their white hind-quarters standing out clear and distinct as targets—right into the zone of danger.

And the lioness was ready for them! A strangled cry, sharp and sudden, told the small hunter that his adroit stalk had not failed, and before he had time to reach her his mother told him too, as she woke the deserts with her glorious voice.

It was an *embarras de richesses* that night! The cub had a whole gazelle to himself—a small one, 'tis true, but a gazelle for all that—and he held the banquet against all comers. Jackals and hyænas made forays, but nothing prevented the little cat doing himself very well, and he lay up afterwards for two days, sleeping off the effects of the gar-

gantuan meal, for all the world like the most *blasé* lion alive.

The lions frequented a new lair now—far away from the desert oasis where the cub was born—a deep nullah overgrown with thorn, in the very midst of the dingiest brown landscape imaginable. How foolish, the young lion thought, to leave the infinite variety of that verdant place, with its real turf, and its trees, its colours, its etchings, and its rainbow effects, that perfect jewel set in a rim of iron, for this burnt-up patch of country, bounded on all sides by blistering red sand. His eyes simply ached with the dull brown of everything.

But—he must see the world, the lioness said severely. 'Home-keeping youth have ever homely wits.' Besides, there was better hunting now outside the oasis, for all antelopes follow the grass.

She was right. Few varieties of the game of Somaliland permanently haunt the oases. I cannot think why. Were I a beast, far rather would I dwell in those fertile gardens than grill on the sand outside.

The flies in the new abode were a perfect pest, and drove the three lions, who were lying up close together, to fury. The enemies were not ordinary flies, but spear-headed insects more cunning than

mosquitoes, and business-like enough to force their needles through the joints of any harness. Even a rhinoceros would feel the prick of such pointed parts!

One day, soon after the cub's famous stalk, the three lions rose simultaneously, their patience exhausted, and made for the open plains, seeking some solitary fastness where sleep was possible.

All Leo's wounds were in a frightful state, and suppurating shockingly. He was the fly attracter, had he but known it. Poor beast! There was no peace nor ease for him, and the insect pest followed him in clouds.

Somalis have it that wounds inflicted by a dying lion are ten times more difficult to cure than those given by a lion in an unhurt condition. Perhaps there is truth in this—there is much wisdom in native fancies, and the old lion was illustrating it. I don't know. He hobbled painfully, and at every step the gash in his shoulder opened wide.

Moving slowly, the lioness leading, the beasts crossed a sandy plain interspersed with mimosa and thorn, a typical bit of Somali cover, which debouched on a Never-Never country of colossal stones and brushwood—an ideal lair for regiments of lions. The cub was thinking of water, the lioness of sleep, and the lion of his wounds.

Abruptly the twang of bow-strings and the whizzing flight of arrows cut the still air. For an instant the tawny cats drew together and halted, and then the urgent mother in her caused the lioness to hurry the cub on down a neat little trail ahead, obviously made by other lions, which led through a stony outcrop to the great citadel of massed rocks and ravines ahead.

What a general she was! She foresaw as no other beast, and took no hazards. Her quick brain had taken in the desperate situation at a glance, and she knew just where the line of Midgan hunters began and just where their pariah-dogs ended. But for her dexterity and finesse the cub would have fallen at once. What chance had a little lion against the courage and resource of those fierce trained hounds—lion-hearts, too!

In between the boulders the two hurried, until the cries of the Midgans sounded far off. Very soon the lioness changed her brisk canter for her usual majestic stride, and every now and again she dwelt on her steps and looked round haughtily.

They crossed a series of stony ridges until they gained a narrow bridge of Nature's making, where the side of the stony ravine curved prow-like overhead and dropped to nothingness below. At the

far end of this centuries-old earthwork was a *cul-de-sac* of rocks, and there the lioness placed the cub the while she kept the bridge, Horatius-wise, lying upon it, still as a bronze statue, with her massive head stretched out on her paws. Sometimes, as the distant murmurs of the battle outside floated on the air, she lashed her tail from side to side, and her burning, luminous eyes betrayed the violence of her difficult-to-suppress fury.

The wounds of the old lion crippled him, and he moved so slowly that ere he too could gain the sanctuary of the rocks, eager pariahs, giving tongue in harsh strident yelps, were about him, harrying him, clamouring in his very face.

Silently, the great cat backed against a high rock and stood at bay, meeting the excited rushes of the dogs with impassive front. They were courageous creatures, for as they barked they dashed in little rushes nearer and nearer, growing bolder as the cries of the Midgans came over the rock to urge the sleuth-hounds on.

The Midgans don't really value brave dogs a bit. In fact, the fiercer a dog the less valuable he is, for such are so quickly killed, whilst the mere keep-its-distance yapper lives to fight another day.

The lion's majestic composure never varied, and

almost without striking out, so easy and simple the action appeared, he laid the foremost dog low, then another. He seemed but to play with them, to scratch ever so slightly, so imperceptible were his lightning movements.

The incessant attacks of the dogs had the two-fold purpose of allowing the Midgans to approach at close quarters the while the attention of the lion was concentrated on his enemies, who turned his mind from the idea of charging.

One big yellow hound, mad with lust of battle, actually came to grips with the dread foe, who rose a little on fore-feet to receive the puny attack, of which he made no more than we should of the onslaught of a kitten. He tossed the mauled dog aside, ripped up by the razor claws, and it lay for a minute on the sand. Then, spent and dying, the bleeding creature commenced to drag itself, with hind-feet trailing, towards the flickering figures hiding among the rocks, and at its master's feet lay down, looking up into a savage, merciless face with pain-filled eyes—eyes which almost spoke. They craved something that in all the dog's long, hard life he had never heard, one word of pity to speed him forth to meet the shadowy unknown. But of pity the Midgan knew nothing. A rough philo-

sophy was his, a science of reasons which tempered the sun, and minimized the rain, but—pity and philosophy are not akin.

Stooping, the wild hunter raised his dog to its feet, willing feet which could work no longer, and then with a flying run the savage half-hurled, half-dragged the dying brute towards the battle-field again. And at the command the brave spirit, flickering out, flamed up again, and he staggered forward to fall as he neared the scene of action, trampled down in the flying rushes of his brethren. All the dogs were having a ghastly time of it. Their yellow coats were red now, and scored all over by the driving claws.

When they found the lion would not move and give the archers another chance, one sombre hunter made some fire at a little distance away by twirling his fire stick, and as the tiny flame burst from the wood he fostered it with some durr grass, and then ignited a large torch of khansa, which he flung into the mêlée, approaching quite close to the animal at bay against the rock.

He was in considerable danger, but was as calm and self-possessed as though he held the latest thing in rifles in his lean brown hand. And it was not recklessness of life which gave this freedom

from fear—knowledge of the ways of beasts merely. The Midgans know that the lion of the day is not the lion of the night, that the two are practically distinct animals, the one unconquerable, undaunted, the other assailable in many ways. He's half asleep to begin with, sated often, bewildered always, and, in this case, half dying.

The sun dazzles—lions are children of the moon.

The torch fell wide, and caught on the long fur of a ruffled hound, who flamed to his doom as if he had been dipped bodily in paraffin. In his pain the burning beast dashed into the very jaws of the lion, who, seeing the column of fire approach, broke forward, stopped again hesitatingly, then rushed blindly from right to left, followed by a flight of arrows. One struck him in the flank, but he never felt the prick. He saw freedom ahead, and fled for it, going strong, strong as his old self.

'He will not die until the sun sets,' the Midgans said among themselves, content to let him go, and called off the red dogs, knowing that though the arrow shaft of reed had fallen to the ground the head of rhinoceros horn, smeared with poison, remained embedded to sap the lion's strength. His hours were numbered, and when they wanted him, they would track him out.

It is one of the strange Midgan fancies that a beast wounded in the morning takes his leave of earth with the sun, and cannot die before.

The setting and the rising sun is irradiated by all the poetry Somalis know. They do not understand anything of the sun's passing under the earth, and believe that, when his declining orb sinks below the horizon, some mysterious magician swings the luminary across the heavens to the Eastern Hemisphere, all in readiness for the dawn.

As they marched to the wells the hunters began the wild chant which, subject to slight alterations, Somalis use when a dangerous beast has been slain. A slow, droning, mournful melody, with nothing of the triumphant about it, haunting and intensely weird.

'This is not a lion—do not think it!
It is a coward and a thief, who would frighten us.
This is not a lion; it is a tyrant and an infidel.
This is not a lion who calls himself the bravest beast of all the beasts; it is a cripple and a poacher.
Have no fear of him.'

Then with a complete *volte-face*, the song went on:

'It is not with needles that the lion is killed.
He is great, he is strong.
His roar is thunder, his teeth are spears.
So shall he die.
We are brave, we are skilful.
Allah be praised!'

The lioness found her dying mate as the sun sank. She had nothing to guide her, nothing to tell her, but lions seem to have some method of communicating their whereabouts that is quite as effective as our telegraphic system.

The vultures still screamed over the dead dogs, and a few dread spirits hovered over the rocks, waiting for the next meal.

The cruel barb did its work. Weakened as he was by his wounds, relics of the day's-old encounter, the lion had no reserve of strength on which to draw. He lay quite silent, on his side, with paws extended, his eyes fast glazing. And with the sunset came the great Liberator.

> 'It is not with needles that the lion is killed.
> He is great, he is strong.
> His roar is thunder, his teeth are spears.
> So shall he die.'

The lioness heard the chant coming nearer and nearer, and silently as a grey wraith she streaked off into the shadows, with the cub close at her side.

The Midgans took the hide of the dead lion for decorative purposes and his heart to make them strong. For this was quite an exceptional beast. He had faced the music grandly, all wounded as

he was. Many lions won't stand up to dogs for a moment, and flee before the clamour.

None of the Somali tribes eat lion's flesh. There's a prejudice against it. Why should there be? We eat bear—it is a cult with all travellers to affect to like it very much; lynx is said to resemble veal—it doesn't really, for I've sampled it; and Darwin found puma quite eatable—I dare say he was hungry when he tried it.

If you ask a Somali why he doesn't like lion meat he says it is tough and stringy, and has a strong taste, from the carrion he eats. But—a big But—the edibility of so many things depends on the *chef*. Lion steak from the gridiron of an Escoffier would revolutionize our ideas.

That night a mighty storm brewed itself over the desert, and broke in majesty. The cub had never experienced such a bombardment before. It reminded him vaguely of the resonant crash which met his ears on the day the Sahib Máro died, only this was much louder and more nerve-shaking. As for the light which played across the heavens and shot downwards into the deepest ravine, it blinded him, and he hid his face in his paws that he might shut the demon spirit out. When the rock beside him was struck, and a splinter hit his ear, he would

have fled the hideous place altogether, but for the grim still sentinel who kept the bridge.

For an hour or more the storm raged. Sometimes the little one thought he heard a lion's voice through the crash of the thunder and above the tearing wind. It could not be his father—he had seen his father die. The god of lions grant he might not die like that—sinking to sleep upon a rock!

The voice again! A brilliant flash played on the extended form of the lioness, throwing into strong relief the beauty of her dauntless attitude. Then all was dark once more.

The pandemonium seemed to the cub all part and parcel of this dreadful day. But for the catastrophe to the old lion this affrighting disturbance had never been.

'When beggars die, there are no comets seen;
The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.'

CHAPTER V

A STURDY YOUNG LION

'To whom do lions cast their gentle look?'
3 King Henry VI.

'Lions make leopards tame.
King Richard II.

A SPIRIT of unrest seized the lioness, and the two beasts, bereft now of the lion's awesome presence, commenced to trek night and day in haphazard fashion. Perhaps the big cat had method in her journeyings, and sought to put miles between herself and the human disturbers of the desert peace. The cub dared not ask her. Her temper was short in those troublous times, and the reach of her paw long.

Some days they went very hungry indeed, for they left the herds of aoul and the grassy lands of the rolling bun behind. But for the carrion found, things would have gone badly. The lioness did not object to carrion in the least; nothing but

its scarcity made her hunt at all. The putrid bulk of a rhinoceros kept them alongside for the best part of a week. Occasionally—this before they got far into the unknown beyond—they even devoured the small baits in the primitive snares set by the Midgans for dik-dik. Dreadfully beneath a lion's dignity! The cub felt his portly figure shrink to manikin size with the humility of it.

Imagine baiting for herbivorous creatures with flesh! And yet the savages all over Somaliland do so constantly, making a fence of cut thorn as a preliminary, with gaps at intervals, in which they erect a noose of sorts, held up by distinctly-to-be-seen props of twigs. The provender, uninviting scraps of any kind of meat, is impaled on the sides of the thorny passage, where it doesn't remain long. The foxes and the jackals attend to that! It must be a very unsophisticated little dik-dik who would run his head into so palpable a gin. But Midgans say they often catch the small antelope in this fashion.

I wonder!

The lioness always advised her son to eat as much as ever he possibly could when the chance came his way, as no lion ever knows when the next meal will happen along, and any amount

of game one week may precede a fortnight of scarcity.

Most of the water they found on their wanderings was barely drinkable, being lukewarm, brackish stuff. There's variety in the beverages of Somaliland, lots of other things too, newts, leeches, and infinitesimal, unnameable terrors among the number. And you may drink liquid of every hue ; iron-red, purple-black, chalky-white, olive-green.

Sometimes the lions came on water clear as crystal lying in the basins formed by the fairy feet of a rhinoceros, and such draughts the cub loved. Once, after a terrific trek through the heat of the day, he drank so deeply, going from hollow to hollow and lapping them dry, that he fell unconscious, and lay prone until the shock to his overheated system passed. He thought he had but slept for a long, long while. He had dreamed dreams, he remembered, of beautiful shooting stars and brilliant lances of light, and he was glad to creep into the shade and sleep some more. It was a teetotal carouse in a hundred !

The cub did wish his mother would avoid the thorn tracts ; they were intolerable. And their variety was so endless, but all were one in their ingenious mechanism, and shaped on the hook

principle, with a lifting and holding capacity almost unbelievable. Even the lioness, who could wriggle her huge body beneath the dread bushes with the sinuous movements of a snake, did not pass unscathed, and as for the cub, the little khaki pennons fluttering in his wake signalled the keenness of his sufferings.

Then, somehow or other, the lioness struck up an acquaintance with another who dropped on them from nowhere one evening as they licked the bones of an oryx which a horde of jackals had pulled down.

She was an absolutely fearless beast, with an offhand air which impressed the cub exceedingly. Strange-natured, too, shunning masculine society like the plague. She would none of it.

Somalis say that such beasts, contrarieties to nature, are far more to be feared than the humdrum materfamilias with cubs at foot.

In our young lion this advanced feminine, this old maid rampant, took no interest at all. He was not of an age, she thought, to be worth counting. Therefore she tolerated him. She was an uncanny creature, as all deviators from the normal always are, thin and gaunt-cheeked to a degree.

He was more than a little afraid of her, and

rather suspected her of being a Sahib Máro in lion's clothing, or something fearsome like that. Which was not so odd nor so original a fancy as the young lion imagined.

The Mijertain Somalis have an idea that certain of their women—psychics or clairvoyants, we should call them, I suppose—have the power of changing themselves into lions at will, and believe that one of their greatest Mullahs, Askar Mohammed, was killed at the claws of one of these invincible semi-human beasts.

The Mullah had just taken unto himself a fourth wife—there's a bit of Brigham Young in the composition of most Mullahs, I'm afraid—and the first of the series, now rapidly passing into the sere and yellow leaf stage, was of the elect few who could be a lion or a lady as she listed. Only, the Mullah knew nothing about it. She had been married to him for twenty years, and he didn't know he had a magician in the house! (Which goes to prove that women really can keep secrets, if they try hard enough.) It wouldn't do to let the average Mullah know you are as clever as he. And this wise man thought, because wife No. 1 could not read the Koran or speak Arabic, she must necessarily be a duffer in other directions. When wife No 4.

arrived, in the hey-dey of her youth and Somali beauty—which is, I must tell you, an acquired taste, and does not appeal to everyone—the supplanted-again first had all she could do to prevent herself lionizing at once.

She took the Mullah a walk instead, and turned the conversation adroitly on to wild beasts and their ways, how they change in colour with the seasons, feign death and invisibility, and other things that naturalists and Somalis know all about, gradually working up to the quaint Mijertain superstition that some women have the mysterious, occult power of transforming themselves into lions.

'And I can do it,' wife No. 1 remarked quietly.

'You!' ejaculated the Mullah disbelievingly.

'Yes, I!' she answered. 'Only I've never told you before because I had to get a husband, you know, and even with a dowry of a hundred sheep, perhaps a lion-woman would have some difficulty in getting off. But I *can* do it.'

Of course, he simply thought she was 'bucking,' as sportsmen say, and that infuriated her.

Even as the Mullah watched he saw the hair, cased in the bag arrangement which is the proud hall-mark of matrimony in Somaliland, growing into a black-tipped, khaki-coloured mane. Her

white tobe fell to the ground and a skin robe took its place on the dread form whose feet and hands were fast shaping into colossal paws, with unsheathed talons at their edge. Her features changed, and her wild eyes glowed and rounded and glowed again with a fiery lustre. . . .

The end of that Mullah was something fearful. His lion-wife killed him without compunction, ate him too, and then took to the wilds never more to live as a woman in a karia, to do the hard camp work, carry water from the wells, build the zareba fence, tend the animals, and erect the primitive skin huts, the while the men looked on and lazed.

The lioness calmed her son's unreasoning fears by saying that it was quite impossible for the chance comer to be anything but what she seemed, for nobody could successfully impersonate that most wonderful of creations—a lion—save a lion himself. In her case family pride was more than inordinate—it was an obsession.

The gaunt stranger said she had been journeying for days and days in the wake of a trading caravan returning from the coast. Most nights she had looted a sheep from the zareba, and for the next meal had selected a speckled heifer, a most

tempting morsel. She licked her lips at the thought of it.

She roared and roared to show the distant camp that the despoiler was still in the vicinity, and our lioness took up the refrain until the cub's ears tingled. Then—why shouldn't he roar also? He was a lion, too. But the weird little noises he made in the back of his throat, none of them so loud as his mother's yawn, discouraged him. He found, however, that he had one splendid bass note, and he played on that until his chest ached.

The lioness was not very anxious to venture near human beings again, but the visitor poohed-poohed her fears. As to the last encounter, well, only a lion died, after all, and there were quite as good lions on the desert as ever went out of it. Lionesses, she said, were twice as wise, twice as courageous, and there was no need to apprehend any danger from a stalk engineered by such astute beings. Only the cub must be left behind. So they ensconced him in a thorn thicket as the hunting hour drew near. He demurred and tried to follow, but his mother drove him back with angry growls, and he had, perforce, to feign an obedience which he was far from feeling.

Just as the two females slunk off, another of the

all-pervading thunder-storms broke in fury overhead, and this time the cub hailed it with delight. His mother would assuredly give up her stalk, and come and sleep beside him in the depths of the cool brake. He had yet to learn that under cover of a tempest, and backed by the raging elements, lions will dare anything.

For some time the little lion dozed comfortably, but, as the wildness passed in deep-tongued mutterings, he raised himself and followed on the spoor of the hunters. He would not remain behind—not all his mother's fiercest growls should make him.

A fitful moon struggled through feathery clouds, but he could see without that, and picked out the pug marks on the sand easily. They held on steadily for a mile or two, leading towards a water hole fringed by a semi-moist plantation of green bushes and long gloomy tunnels of arching khansa and guda trees.

It was one of those rare places in Somaliland, a pool fed by a spring, and to its wonderful waters game of every kind resorted. It was quite a big pool, as such pools go, forty feet or so long, and at its lower end was a rolling place beloved of rhinoceroses. What a quagmire!

The cub made out, or thought he did, the spot

on the bank whereon his mother had stopped to drink, but the place was a labyrinth of tracks, leading in every direction.

First, he slaked his thirst, and as he drew back stealthily to cover, the squelch of displaced mud drew his attention to a silent shadow looming large in the far recesses of the pool.

A hideous beast! And what short legs to support so vast a carcass! The cunning, low-set eyes looked about calmly, impassively—they had no fear in them at all. How different from the glassy stare of antelope! In and out between the colossal creature's fore legs a quaint little hornless calf sported—its ugly mother in exact miniature; and every now and again the great pachyderm guided the atom to shallow safety by gentle prods of her tremendous snout.

The cub was so interested that he remained where he was to watch. This, then, was the armoured beast his mother had warned him against. It was a different thing altogether from the carrion they had feasted upon. The lioness had said, he remembered, that only by the concerted attack of many lions was the rhinoceros assailable. It looked invulnerable.

After a long drink, the mighty bulk, grumbling

and puffing like a train starting, rolled over in the water, throwing up the mud in murky waves, and the calf, bleating hopelessly, ran round and round the pool wildly. Sometimes nothing but the frightful head showed above the surface of the pool—a forest Venus rising from the deep.

What a chance! thought the cub. If he were but two months older! And in that reflecting second he realized that another lion, a full-grown beast, lay within easy distance of the roaming calf. To spring or not to spring—that was the newcomer's question, and it was answered for him in the negative by the rhinoceros heaving her dripping bulk from the pool and moving away, lopping the plumed grasses with twisting tongue as she went. The lion streaked off in her wake—a suicidal lion, surely.

All was silent again, and still the cub stayed on. Such places had always an intense fascination for him, perhaps because he was born in a green oasis, or perhaps because the cool feel of the grasses and the soft breath of the place soothed his burnt skin. He only knew he loved luxuriant spots far more than the blistering sands. He harked back to some long-gone ancestor, for his mother couldn't have enough sun.

The morning star rose, shining with a brilliance unknown to us. Turtle-doves and sand grouse, plovers and painted snipe, blue rock pigeons and crimson-bodied, long-tailed whydah finches lighted on the mud banks to drink, and down the rides metallic francolins flighted with the cleverness of the woodcock at avoiding obstacles.

The whirr of startled wings heralded an arrival, and against a light sky four beautifully striped koodoo stood outlined, feeling the wind and scanning the marge of the pool. A fine old bull stalked forward, leading the way, looking what he was, the most exquisite thing that walks. The cub had never seen such horns—their spirals seemed to touch the clouds.

It was a liberal education in zoology. The paths of gerenük, oryx, dibitag, wild dogs, foxes, leopards, wild cats all converged here—the only water hole for miles.

The carnivores came stealthily, but surely, the antelope with a lurking fear in their timid eyes, and they looked before they drank. Once an aard-wolf stole from the forest belt with the quick right-and-left glance his mother taught him ere she gave him the freedom of the wild, and as he finished his drink he raised his head and howled dismally.

That cleared the place of game for a long time—effectually.

As the sun got up a tiny dik-dik tip-toed to the pool's edge and looked at his graceful reflection in the mirror below. He was but ten feet from the cub's hiding-place, on slightly lower ground.

It was too tempting! And the little cat, his movements possessed with a stillness which astonished himself, prepared for a spring. The elasticity of his limbs was ever a joy to him. He would light on the antelope's back, and kill with a neck bite—just there!

His jump fell short by some feet, and the discomfited cub, sprawling on the margin of the pool, saw his quarry turn and flash away unhurt. He sulked under a bush for an age—his pride was hurt, and that's the hardest blow of all to cure.

In the haze of the morning a troop of animals which the cub took to be lions came down to the water hole. They were wart-hog really, and the curious optical illusion they presented is one that has been noticed again and again by naturalists. The wart-hog is built very much on the ground plan of a lion, heavy in front and falling away behind.

The sounder trotted up the green tunnel, moving

like clockwork. A big boar, superlatively ugly, was leading, with gleaming tushes and tiny alert eyes, shaking his mighty head.

A movement in the grass startled them, and they were off in panic, tails erect, crashing through the bushes with the velocity of 18-pounder shells. One —the smallest—hurried to the little *pied-à-terre* he had made for himself, and, turning round, backed into it tail first! It was a tight fit, just big enough to hold him.

The cub turned his back on the pool regretfully; it was so beautiful. Why couldn't his mother live contentedly in such a place? There was game enough for a hundred lions.

The herons were shaking the dews from their wings as he passed, hanging them out to dry in the rays of the morning sun; storks plumed their feathers among the reed beds; and a solemn-faced Adjutant bird did Orderly's duty, waiting on the whims of a majestic marabou who wanted every feathered thing cleared away from his vicinity without the trouble of enforcing the order himself. Outside the evergreen space the brazen desert extended, dotted over by the familiar sparse cover, and on the far horizon a fretted outline suggested the presence of a caravan in zareba for the night.

The cub could not guess now whither his mother had travelled; he had lost the spoor in the endless maze of tracks leading to and from the pool.

He strode contentedly over a broken bit of ground, cut up by hig aloes and wait-a-bit thorns. Suddenly his quick eyes caught a glimpse of something tawny stealing from bush to bush, coming nearer all the time—stalking him!

The cub knew the tricks so well. His mother always approached everything, even beasts she had slain and hidden away herself, with the same slow precaution and finesse. It was all part of the hunter's make-believe, a 'Let's-pretend-the-dead-animal-might-jump-up-and-bite-us' pantomine, which added zest to the dullest day. But—to think of a beast no larger than himself trying to waylay him! Really, all the jungle people conspired to treat him as a baby. He was a ponderous thing, too, by this time, and aggressive when he liked.

Two can play at the stalking game. The cub crouched, and hunched his shoulders, and ran forward low to earth, and pulled up, and laid his head flat on the sand, and reconnoitred in approved fashion. He even used his new-found chest note, growling in a sort of ecstasy like a melodious siren

on a foggy night, and that did the trick. His enemy slunk off through the bushes with cat-like tread, a cunning-faced beast—the cub knew him again at once—the leopard with the claws which won't draw in.

Ahead lay a narrow trail, a dark riband across the burnt grass, from which the heavy dew of the night had been brushed away as by the passing of some biggish creature, for, on either side, the moisture, not yet sucked up by the sun, lay like hoar-frost in winter. Now and again the confused pugs of lions showed clearly, running from the distant outlines, which looked like a zareba, to the thorn brakes.

Sailing round and round majestically were many vultures, swooping low to rise again. It was plain from the screams of the birds that a kill was at hand.

In a small amphitheatre of stones and brushwood the cub came on the mangled remains of a speckled heifer, practically untouched. The lions had not eaten their prey—it was thrown to the jackals and the kites. By some rare mischance the meat had been spoiled by the careless canine teeth of the cats tearing the paunch, which tainted the flesh. Carrion-eaters though they were, the meal was ruined for them!

Countless vultures gathered, and now and again a spirit more fearless than the rest winged silently to the carcass and daringly grabbed a morsel. By the way the birds were acting the cub guessed that the lioness was lying up beside the meat, and he followed the track leading into the recesses of the thorns and called, called softly. From the depths the familiar voice answered. She was half asleep, but she purred as the young lion snuggled close.

It had been a royal hunting night. The gaunt lioness, fearless beyond all beasts, had crept through the zareba fence under cover of the storm, and in the confusion caused by her appearance had stricken down and carried off the heifer. It was a glorious sight to see her crashing through the fence, with the prey dragging from her jaws. And all the camp was in turmoil, torches thrown this way and that, dogs barking, cattle stampeding. As the lions were tearing the carcass a body of men issued from the zareba—a most unbelievable thing. Somalis when once inside the fence o' nights cannot be persuaded to go outside of it again until morning doth appear.

In the darkness someone crept up quite close to the big cats, and the murderous weapons used by Sahib Máros cracked here and there. The gaunt

lioness was not so wise as she seemed! They had raided no trading caravan, but the zareba of a white man.

Then the strange lioness had charged; nothing could hold her back. Someone fell, and in the ensuing commotion the two great beasts dragged away the heifer. It was outside now, and the lioness yawned.

But the cub wanted to hear what had become of the stranger.

She had gone—unexplainably, as she had come. Another lioness had stalked by, more like the gaunt one than the gaunt one herself—a sister perhaps—and the two had drifted away together.

It set the cub thinking. Had he any sisters and brothers of his own wandering somewhere in the great waste places? His mother cogitated for a moment. She was counting. Yes, she said, considering, six, or eight, perhaps, if they were all alive.

Then the cub would know why she, who clung so closely to him, ever let the others go.

'They left me as I left my mother,' she told him cheerfully, 'and as you, too, will leave me when two or three years have passed.'

She was quite, quite wrong, the young one

assured himself. He would stay and hunt with her as long as she lived, however faithless his brothers and sisters had proved themselves. What would lion life be without a mother? She guessed his thoughts, in her marvellously intuitive way, and rubbed her splendid head against his soft shoulder —he had no mane as yet.

'As I left my mother,' she repeated, 'and as you, too, will leave me when two or three years have passed.'

CHAPTER VI

EARLY DAYS OF HUNTING

'All expect that you should rouse yourself,
As did the former lions of your blood.'

King Henry V.

'And saw the lion's shadow ere himself,
And ran dismayed away.'

Merchant of Venice.

The cub was eight months old on the great day when he slew, unaided, a beast for himself, not a very fearsome antagonist—a harmless sheep, who gave up his life without a murmur. It was the young lion's private opinion that he could have killed the biggest antelope long ago, but his mother ever held him back, telling him that most things come to lions who wait, and artfully suppressing the fact that very many spoil altogether in the keeping, or lose their value in the transit.

A fat sheep is a rare treat to any lion, for by night the great flocks are safely penned in the shelter of a strong zareba, and by day the King of

Beasts is usually asleep, or if a-prowl he does not, as a rule, approach the shepherded herds which dot the plains like the sands of the sea.

Antelope have no fat on them to speak of, however well pastured they may happen to be. The Somalis say that all the fat goes into the glossy coats. It may be so. There's none inside!

And lions love grease. That's the reason why zebra flesh is to a lion what we are given to understand turtle soup is to the London alderman. Zebra meat has more fat on it than any other which comes within the scope of Leo's jaws. Unfortunately, zebras do not live all over Somaliland, but in the Boorgha country, down to the Webbi Sheybeli; and the habitat of the wild ass, whose succulent flesh runs that of the zebra very close, is restricted also.

The two lions had been out all night, trekking, trekking after game, restlessly, fruitlessly. Only once, at dawn, did they come on any possible-to-be-stalked antelope and that chance the cub bungled. It was his opportunity, an indulgence, and he failed! A most humiliating business, for his mother was watching critically to see how he would acquit himself. After all, it was hardly a fair test of skill, though perhaps, had he been a

trifle quicker, the quarry would not have escaped so easily.

They were creeping through a very dense covert, a sort of natural zareba, sombre and dark, but in the great tunnellings made by the passing of big beasts it was possible to see the light of the open desert beyond, and as the big cats, going against the wind, neared the outskirts of the place, the glint of spiral horns flickered on their line of vision, and a white chin bobbed up and down as some massive antelope chose out the sweetest thorns. It was an ideal opportunity for a careful stalk and a spring, for the heedless quarry, a beautiful lesser koodoo, rustled the bushes loudly as he tugged at tough resisting branches which would not give way, and though his great broad ears moved constantly from side to side, the noise he was making deadened all other faint sounds. For once his marvellous sense of hearing was set at naught.

Step over step the cub pulled up to striking distance, making no rustle at all, and in his wake trailed the lioness, moving like a snake in wonderful waves and undulations.

Once the success of the stalk tottered perilously as the young lion routed a few ostrich chicks, who

rushed hither and thither in panic. One little fluffy yellow-black atom, about twelve inches high, very podgy and important-looking, stood for a moment right in the fair-way, and gazed into the fierce leonine face with bright, unblinking boot-button eyes, delaying the royal progress. But for the presence of the near-by antelope his shrift had been short!

A few more diligently planned steps and all had been well—for the lion! But the lesser koodoo possessed a familiar in the shape of a red-billed rhinoceros bird, who rode contentedly on the silky back, hunting with deft, starling-like movements for grass ticks—an inspiriting game!

The cub was within jumping distance, and only the half-arc of his skull showed above the grass, when the rhinoceros bird caught the shadow of the despoiler on the sand. 'Tcha! Tcha!' it screamed in warning note, rising into the air on tremulous wings.

And off went the antelope, sailing over the broken ground like a graceful yacht.

The cub had not learned to bear reverses philosophically, and the chances are that, if his mother had passed any purring or growling comment on the misfortune, he would have turned and

bitten her. In the force of his passion he weighed on his fore-paws with all his might, and clawed the earth with his back ones. Then he spat and fumed at a thorn spike which got him below the belt and tore a piece of his skin clean off.

The lioness—wise beast!—went to sleep where she was, but the cub, stung by his failure, and impelled by youthful appetite, wandered on, following the game trails whenever possible, as his mother had taught him to do, that he might avoid rustling the sun-dried grasses in his passing.

Long-necked bustard raced ahead, going like greyhounds for hundreds of yards, taking the hummocks in their flying stride, and then rising brokenly—anyhow. Beautiful birds, with dark brown crests, and coats, like Joseph's, of many colours.

Once he nearly trod on a yellow dark-headed snake lying near a thorn bush. It was only about eighteen inches long, but long enough to make the cautious lion meditate a détour. But the reptile—a Socialist, perhaps—manifested a dislike of its own to a king's presence, and made off under a stone.

On the open plain—the Dumberelli, if the cub had known its name—mobs of camels grazed, with

their faithful satellites, the rhinoceros birds, clinging to haunches and shoulders. Sheep there were also, in hundreds, all in charge of poor-looking Somali youths, who beguiled the shining hours in drinking camels' milk stored in the filthiest of harns, or in roasting scraps of sun-dried meat on sticks over a fire made in a neat trench.

The young lion crept carefully all round the herds, until he got as far off the men as possible. He kept in the longest grass, and moved carefully, so that its undulations might not betray him.

The camels fed on, imperturbable as ever, and the sheep, unlike antelope, never looked about them for lurking, unseen dangers. It was as if they cast the onus of everything on to the shepherds, mere broken reeds, who had forgotten sheep, camels, and all else in the joys of a picnic breakfast. Sometimes they sang all about their prowess in battle, and hunting, and spear-throwing, but never of love. And that's curious, when you come to think of it, with a people who go in for matrimony on the wholesale scale of Somalis.

A goat walked past the lion's hiding-place, a most Oriental-looking goat, so close that a blow of the lion's paw would have spanned the separating distance. And yet he stayed it. He waited for

the on-coming sheep, the sheep streaming by in dozens, huge fat things with monstrous tails almost to be measured by the 'full cubit's breadth' of Herodotus.

He was on the nearest with a rapidity which astonished himself, swishing through the grass with a terrific force which landed him on his victim's back, and one capacious neck bite finished the business.

Goethe says (and it seems to me that he and Shakespeare between them said almost everything worth saying) that 'every author in some degree portrays himself in his works, even against his will.' It's just like that with lions in their methods of killing. By their kills you shall know them. All his later life our lion showed his force of character in his kills. When he struck he struck. The temporizing lion, the 'Allah help me,' inert beast, the vacillating, slow-witted creature had nothing in common with him.

To-day, in the flush of his victory, he took up the body of his victim and let it fall again, batted it from paw to paw and gambolled with it, making believe the dead thing had retaliating life, and playing as a lesser cat plays with a mouse. For some minutes he sported thus, and then dragged

the carcass deeper into the brown grass, where he broke it up and ate it contentedly.

Now he found his despised dew-claw the most useful of all he had. Powerful as a mammoth thumb, it skewered down the largest hunk of meat the while the diner ripped and tore the flesh from the bones.

Once he thought himself disturbed, and he turned with an angry grunt. The hot, nauseating smell of a camel blew across the waste, and heavily the big beast passed, like his aroma.

The little lion did not move after the banquet, but slept the sleep of the sated where he was. There were no remains left for him to watch over, for the whole carcass, save a few small bones, was consumed. Not bad for a young one! Somali sheep have no horns; an' they possessed any, such trifles would not have baulked him. The cub's appetite was really very similar to that of a boa-constrictor.

The amount of food a full-grown wild lion can put away is almost unbelievable. I wonder what the beasts in the great cat house at the Zoo, with their miserable daily portions of eleven pounds of meat apiece, would say to the whole of a sheep, or an oryx, or the greater part of a zebra?

That his mother was absent when he awakened from his gorged sleep worried him, at first, not at all. If she wanted him she would call him, and at any moment, he supposed, he could locate her, although he had not the haziest notion how to set about it. Meanwhile, he would try his 'prentice hand on the quantities of game about him. It would be practice, if nothing else.

And that very night he pulled down a cow oryx, the antelope a lion most respects.

The sun had gone down in a burst of glory, suffusing the wild plain with a soft rosy light. Overhead the bats flew singly, in long files, like a skein of geese in their measured wing beats. From the shadows of the thorns the game crept into the open like phantom armies.

Tucked away in a belt of khansa was a baby oryx—it was not long before the young lion sniffed it out. He seized and killed it as easily as we should a fly, but almost as its dying bleat rattled in its throat the doe charged in like a Juggernaut, head lowered for the attack, her whole weight set for the blow. A vigorous stab in his shoulder swung the lion completely round, but, regaining his balance immediately, in his youthful vigour and elasticity, he smote her on the hip with heavy paw,

almost throwing the big antelope down. He was audacious, for an eight-months-old cub is no match for the warlike oryx, who can fight, hammer and tongs, and inflict heavy wounds with razor hoofs and teeth. And think of those which the rapier horns are able to deal!

As she pulled up in a great slide to draw up for a return joust, her fierce young enemy, disregarding all the rules and traditions of lion warfare, flung himself on the antelope's hind-quarters, tearing viciously at the back of the soft neck.

She could not dislodge him, though she tried every possible tactic to drive the merciless horns home, and gradually, gradually, the beautiful head drooped, and she succumbed, sinking in a heap on the sand. She was old and run down, and in shocking condition generally, or her youthful foe had not conquered so simply.

He roared as loudly as he could, calling his mother to the feast, but she never came, and to the royal invitation only the jackals responded, hordes of them coming from all points of the compass. The hungry little creatures benefited not at all, for after the lion had eaten what he wanted, he lay up beside the carcass, watching it, until his internal arrangements permitted of his eating some more.

One alert spirit made off with the remains of the baby oryx—a small scrap among so many mouths.

Next day, as soon as the sun was up, he roamed hither and thither, through all the sunny hours, searching for the mother he had somehow lost, for she was lost now, he feared. Never had she left him so long alone. How was it she could not find him, all-wise as he knew her to be? He had slept with one ear open, listening for the familiar roar, but the deep vibrations he knew so well rang in none of the mighty voices.

A very immature gerenük, standing on his hind-legs to feed on the young shoots of a prickly thorn, momentarily attracted the lion, who halted to gaze. Had he been hungry he might have attempted a stalk; as it was, 'They are as sick who surfeit with too much as they who starve with nothing.' The antelope went off at a crouching trot, stopping after a short run, with unparalleled impudence, to stare at the tawny cub. Gerenük are a great mainstay in the lion dietary, for they seldom or never gallop, and attain no high rate of speed, even when travelling at best pace.

Stalking solemnly along, the young lion scattered a pack of wild dogs—His Majesty's suite—sleeping in the grass. One snarling brute jumped up,

flurried, almost at the cub's feet, giving tongue vigorously in a sharp metallic bark which aroused a regular anvil chorus. Then, as the clamorous ones realized the rank of the intruder, their anger died away in furtive yaps and fawning salutations.

Somalis have a very quaint notion regarding these curious-looking variegated dogs, the 'Wilde Hondes' of the old-time Cape Boers. They say that the creatures, so like hyænas, yet unlike hyænas, so similar to wolves, and yet so different, are neither male nor female, but both at once! The next time the lion saw the pack, who do not depend so largely as does the hyæna on the king of beasts for provender, they were drawing the khansa covers, with all the wisdom, cunning, finesse, and logic of human hunters.

Then, as the dogs viewed, the air rang with the wild calls — weirdest of sounds when the sun is high—and a Speke's gazelle buck, terror-stricken, broke from the sheltering brake. After it raced the dread pursuers, fourteen couple of them, big hounds and strong, sweeping along in a compact body, ears cocked, sterns down, whimpering, with a dry patter, patter of feet. In a healthy state Speke's gazelle on the straight should outdistance most things, but a Midgan arrow in the side makes

a difference, and, like Mercutio's wound, will usually suffice. The gallant little buck was pulled down after the shortest of runs, broken up, and eaten in a flash, not a bone remaining.

Ostrich spoor was all about. The young lion had never yet come across, in all his wanderings, a specimen of the bird who stole the lion's roar. He had not seen them, because ostriches are not nocturnal in their habits, like lions, and in Somaliland, at least, are going the way of the elephant. When he did sight one, picking the grass in the odd contemplative way of these birds, the cub thought he had never seen an uglier creature, save the armour-plated one, the rhinoceros. Long, naked, slaty-coloured legs, brightly patched with red on the front, supported a blackish body out of proportion altogether to its 'understandings.' But—he felt it was a citizen of the wild to be reckoned with ; what other bird stood nearly four feet to the top of its back ?

Two exquisite koodoo crossed ahead, going like the wind. And once he heard the faint barking of the dogs again, drawing some other cover. Otherwise the wilderness slept in the heat of the sun. He drooped his sombre leonine head as the fierce rays smote him between the eyes. Waves of heat

seemed to rise in his face as his soft pads turned the dry sand. He very rarely gambolled now; only once in many days did he skip and spring as would become a cub. He was no longer a cub. He was eight months old, and sedate.

He passed through desert tracts columned by giant flumes of sand, which rose to great heights and hung in the air drifting, drifting, but not disintegrating—a curious spectacle; thence into rough nullahs where in rocky hollows stagnant water lodged. It was salt as brine! And the lion was so thirsty, too!

Coming up again on to the flat, he said good-bye—so quickly does the face of the desert change sometimes—to sand wastes, and trod park-like stretches where, through low-growing trees, clear water gleamed—a glimpse of Paradise.

Finding a comfortable bed in a belt of armo creeper, the young lion lay down, yawning loudly.

His thoughts wandered to his beautiful mother—she would be deeming him faithless now, like his renegade brothers and sisters.

'As you will leave me,' she had said.

And he yawned again.

Wonder of wonders! He was answered almost immediately from the depths somewhere, and in

great amaze he realized that the strangely muffled sound was his mother's call-note. Where was she? Excitedly he looked about him in every direction, and sniffed the air. Again the summons, deep, sonorous—a buried voice.

The next time he heard it he followed it up, and the vibrating murmur led him to the edge of an abysmal place cut in the solid rock, with edges grown again and overgrown by a tangle of scrub bushes and luxuriant creeping plants. And down, deep down, in the recesses of this mysterious cell, the lioness was hidden!

She had fallen into a long-disused elephant trap, such as are still to be found in parts of the Ogaden and Haweea countries; great pits, dug by natives in the years long gone for the undoing of unwary pachyderms.

It was not really so deep as the young lion imagined; he was timorous, and fearful of joining his mother in the vasty hollow, and would not venture very close to investigate, but prowled round and round with frightened eyes, distressfully.

The lioness had spoilt her chances of immediately jumping out again by falling to on a fat oryx which had tumbled into the elephant trap like herself.

Even the most agile and alert lion, in that restricted space, which allowed so poor a take-off, was going to find the leap for liberty and life a biggish proposition.

The forward bound of a grown lion is prodigious, and no hunter knows the full extent of it. The French traveller Delegorgue spoke of the jump of a male lion as measuring 'eighteen of my paces,' and those, I take it, would be well over thirty-six feet. Certainly a spring of twenty to twenty-five is quite an average leap.

In Algeria the pit-falls for the entrapping of the King of Beasts were dug to a depth of twenty feet, but in Somaliland the natives do not believe that any lion ever yet vaulted higher than fourteen feet.

An elephant of the country would be a topping big beast if it scaled ten feet at the shoulder, so that the depth of the traps is well within the jumping capabilities of most lions.

The presence of the young lion on the verge of her prison incited the lioness to frenzies of Trojan endeavour, but again and again she fell back worsted. With every fresh attempt her son heard the soft thud of her lithe body as she dropped, and the scraping of her unsheathed claws on the rocky walls.

Then she roared in deep resounding roars, voicing

her personal animus against all elephant traps and this one in particular.

Far away, in a slumbrous camp, some white men heard the rumble, and took it to be the mutterings of a brewing storm. The Somali shikáris thought so, too. 'Gabbow!' they said, 'Gabbow!' (Thunder).

Sleeping the hot hours away, the English sportsmen in their dreams were spooring still, always successfully, saying to themselves when they wakened, as did Amenemhat two thousand years before Christ, 'I hunted the lion.'

For the best part of an hour the lioness rested to recover her breath.

By this time the young beast had made up his mind that the treacherous hole was like to be his mother's sepulchre. How warily he would go thenceforward, with such pitfalls in the land!

But now, down in the depths, the big cat retreated to her farthest corner, giving herself the extra take-off, and then, with every sense turned on the object of her desire, and every muscle under command, she sprang upward and landed on the ground beside her son.

He gambolled then! forgetting age, dignity, and majesty in his gladness.

CHAPTER VII

DEATH OF THE MOTHER LIONESS

'Here come two noble beasts in, a man and a lion.'
Midsummer Night's Dream.

'The vasty wilds . . . are as throughfares now.'
Merchant of Venice.

He found her but to lose her, and this time for ever. The dread thing happened soon after dawn, whilst the east was opalescent, and the early sun a-shimmer on the reed-beds around the well-holes.

Every blade of grass was dew-beaded, and flashing myriad points of fire; exquisite golden webs —the Somali spiders spin in gold to match the sun —stretched their glittering cables from thorn to thorn. The chirrup of the grasshoppers rang insistent, and across the sand gorgeous crimson butterflies fluttered, Ariel-like, gossamer-winged.

The lions came slowly up the rise from a kill in the hollow in which the wells were dug, the lioness leading, as was her dominating wont, and passed

onwards through the scrub bushes to their stronghold in the stones. Perhaps the drowsy hum in the air lulled their senses, or perhaps, gorged and inert, they forgot momentarily — as even the greatest warriors are apt to do sometimes— that in an enemy-infested country there is never any peace.

The concentrating of the birds gave away the secret of the lion sanctuary. From north, south, east, and west they came, until the sky was dotted with black specks growing larger and larger every minute. They did not flap their pinions, or appear to hurry, but sailed and soared in narrowing circles, ruthlessly, majestically. Then from a tremendous height the first vulture dropped, as though shot, with closed wings, on to the kill.

Down in the well-hollow, behind a sheltering clump of aloes, a little drama played itself to a finish. Bending over the deep marks in the sand surrounding the half-eaten remnants of a freshly killed gerenük were two Sahib Máros. With one hand each held the reins of his unshod pony, and with the other grasped a rifle as though it stood between him and eternity. They both looked for the moment scared into a sort of nervous tension as they examined with keen critical eyes the speak-

ing indents, and averaged the weight of the lions by the depth of the betraying imprints. The ground, firm damp sand, recorded the spoor with the precision of a mould.

Now that the great moment for which they had schemed and planned and striven was at hand, excitement reigned supreme, and the oddest tingling sensation ran through their veins like wine.

Quietly eager, the taller of the two signed to some Somali hunters standing in a little group in the rear, and in a moment the Headman, with the excellent stage management for which he was famed above all other Headmen on the roster in Berbera, had his satellites spooring on every side.

The wind carried the secret of their coming—Boreas is the tale-bearer of all tale-bearers in the wilderness—but for his gossip the waste places of the earth would be trite and difficult indeed.

With a 'whuff' the two big beasts leapt up, and over the stones and away, for all the world like a couple of mammoth common or garden cats, and as the ground opened up to rolling plateaux they cantered together, almost touching shoulders.

As soon as they gathered that they were being tracked they ran in a big circle, as lions are wont

to do, with the object of reaching the beginnings of their path again—a useless manœuvre this time, for, on the instant, the Sahib Máros were tearing along, hard on the game. The leader would have ventured a shot from the saddle, but dared not—the going was so desperately bad, and if there was one thing he objected to it was a cocked rifle at a gallop over ant-bear holes.

Making a smart détour, two of the Somali horsemen rounded the lions up, and for an instant it seemed that the tawny creatures stopped dead in surprise. Then the young lion broke through the flimsy cordon, and vanished as effectually as though the earth had swallowed him.

It is wonderful how so large an animal as the lion can so instantly obliterate itself. So similar are the tints of the brown-yellow coats to the shades in the sand and the grass that they all merge and become one. The sinuous, undulating forms, too, play no small part in the scheme of invisibility.

His running away was no argument against his courage. As the lion grew older, his calibre was such that he attacked most animals on the smallest provocation, as some lions will, but it was bred in his young bones to shun a conflict whenever

possible, especially with men. A lioness with cubs to defend would charge a brigade of howitzers cheerfully, but the average lion assaults human beings from no other reason but terror, and a vague unreasoning dread at being so close to the two-legged creature feared above all other living beings.

The lioness stood for a moment, obviously thinking out her next best move, and then, like an arrow from a bow, she sped, at an unbelievable pace, towards the leading Sahib Máro.

With quivering tail extended and horrible, coughing grunts, she galloped alongside the terrified pony, low to earth, like a dog. Ever and again the great cat rose on her strong hind-legs, and tried to seize and hold the rushing horse with clutching fore-paws.

Once she got him fair and square on the flank, a second time also, but by the very sharpness of her outstretched claws he eluded her. Going at that mad pace she could not retain her grip—her talons cut through the flesh like razors.

One excited Somali, choosing a most inopportune moment, cast his throwing spear, a cruel barbed affair, at the furious beast. Accurately pitched, it is a deadly weapon, and as he threw he gave the

handle a sharp knock on the palm of his hand which conveyed an odd trembling balance which held the shaft straight as it flew through the air. This hunter was a novice in the art or nervous, may be; anyhow, all he struck was the Sahib's unfortunate pony, whose cup of misery wellnigh overflowed.

Confused by the shouts, and the whistle of the spear, the thudding of the horses' hoofs, and the blinding glare of the sun in her eyes, the lioness suddenly abandoned further attack and went off at a right angle. As she fled, the Sahib checked his sobbing horse, and, dismounting, took a chance wobbly shot. It told, however. Entering at the flank, it drove clean forward, the lioness lurched as she ran, and her great wide stride broke. With a roar that shook the earth, and caused the birds to rise in frightened flocks, the enormous beast sprang forward high into the air, right into the giant reeds, which closed over her like the waves of a slumbrous summer sea.

Wounded as she was, she expected to be followed —what else? Did not these white men follow everywhere? The vasty wilds were as thoroughfares for Sahib Máros.

She did not know that only a crossed-in-love

hunter, anxious to impress an all-important HER by his glorious deeds or death, would enter such a trap as the reed-beds—hospital for all sick, and therefore angry, beasts.

She waited awhile where she had lighted, stifling her groans, waited and waited for the betraying crackles and undulations of the tall stems. Her powerless passion spent itself in the vicious twitching of her broad ears, in the constant movement of her tail. Her torment was acute, but in this her last extremity, the bravery of her spirit rose unconquerable. She never struck sail to a fear.

When her pursuer did not come she retired farther in, and still farther, lying with her massive head on her paws, watching, watching, trying to forget the burning torture within.

Outside the thick cover the two Sahibs stood talking earnestly, the one trying to dissuade the other from penetrating the reeds.

Yes, certainly he understood that he would be taking on the most dangerous hunt of his life; knew the temper of the beast who waited for him in the hinterland beyond. He would not stay until the gathering of the vultures announced the death of the lioness; perhaps she wouldn't die; besides, he wanted to be in at it himself.

And ever at the back of his mind was the glorious thought of telling HER. She would listen then, and count him worth while!

He entered the miniature forest at its weakest corner. It was a dense rampart, in parts eight feet or so high, with giant stems so closely packed that it was only in the game paths that the hunter found he could move at all. It was like a fiery furnace in the sultry, airless depths; each stem, as he touched it, burnt and stung. He thought out every step carefully ere he placed it, and parted the stout reeds with his rifle, peering ahead as he cautiously advanced.

In two long hours, the longest he had ever known, he had not moved more than two hundred yards. He was adroit, though, this lithe, tall, bearded Sahib Máro, even if he was a fool-hunter, as the Americans call takers-on of wild chances, and when a swampy mud-hole, soft and spongy, sought to ensnare his lightly-shod feet, he turned off carefully, and rejoined the narrow path higher up.

The brazen sun penetrated even this density. Big blue-bottle flies jumped up in the hunter's flushed face. Buzz! and then down again into the red-hot sand. Little chestnut-brown mice

scudded away with squeaks of alarm and a dry clicking rustle of tiny feet. A wart-hog rose up suddenly just ahead, and after giving a quick 'sizing-up' look from his tiny fierce eyes, lost himself again.

Oh! for some air, some shade, some water! Would the chance at the lioness never come! He couldn't see the maze of cover round about him now, and the little winding riband of a game-trail grew dark and perilous. There was nothing anywhere but a golden maze of light, and a world of noisy hammers on the anvil of his ears

Then, as with a sudden douche of reviving water, the touch of the sun passed. For the reeds were moving gently, ominously, slightly to his left. Some big beast was stirring, and he knew that beast was his quarry. His heart thumped so heavily he nearly gasped, and thought that nothing could prevent the lioness from hearing him.

Through a gap where the reeds grew sparser and dwindled in size, he caught a momentary glimpse of a lashing tail, that was all! The lioness did not turn to face her enemy, who crouched now, silent as could be, and scarcely breathing amid the sheltering sanctuary of the undergrowth and twisted spear-grasses.

So closely was he hemmed in that any attempt at a shot would have cost him his life. His arms were pinioned down by the overwhelming sea of strong stems; it was almost impossible to bring up a rifle.

He began to work himself round the lion's stronghold, and ascertained by softly throwing up a bit of cotton-grass the way the sultry breath of the place was inclined to blow; he must get below the wind to obtain even a dog's chance. Then he took to the all-fours method of progression, hampered by the troublesome but necessary rifle.

It was the stalk of his life, he told himself. Never had he been so far-seeing, so lucky, so careful, or schemed so wisely. Nervousness left him, doubts of all kinds—he was going to win. And what an adversary! It was splendid!

The dreadful thought flashed through his mind of the imminence of his danger should his shooting-companion, or one of the Somali hunters, in the warmth of their sympathetic ardour, take to some flank movement whereby the position of things might be altered by a hair's breadth. He heard, as in a dream, the low buzz of their voices in the distance; it all seemed like some fantastical chimera of the brain. Himself in that hot jungle tangle,

and not thirty yards away a wounded lioness of mettle and businesslike habits. Had she turned by even so much as a quarter-circle, she must have seen her enemy and sorted him out as something untoward.

Suddenly the lioness gave tongue fiercely in short abrupt growls, with a world of ferocity in their throaty snarls. Still she did not break cover, and the noise she made enabled her tracker to locate her position to a nicety, as at each growling reverberation he seized the opportunity of placing himself better.

Twenty minutes' further crawling, and in a corner of the reed-beds where four game-paths linked up, he met her. She stood—a disturbing spirit—on a comparatively clear island of grass about forty yards off, looking at her adversary steadily, with upper lip well drawn down and a strange concentration of gaze which affected him to surprise even then. It was so contemplative, so contemptuous, so curiously remorseless.

She hesitated about charging, and, like all feminine things, hesitating, was lost. The Sahib's rifle was up in a moment.

'Bang—ssh! Bang—ssh!' said the listening Somalis. 'Dar libbah am dead.'

The bullet struck the lioness in her broad chest. For an instant she blenched, and doubled herself up like a caterpillar, gave one or two convulsive twists, and then with a furious, choking roar came on a few yards, worrying the ground with her mouth.

Getting the great head over his sights as he knelt on one knee, the imperturbable shikári pulled the trigger again—the bullet grazed the beast's shoulder merely, and lashed her to fury.

A heartshaking second! The tawny bulk hurled itself through the air with a spring unequalled in force and ruthless desperation, and as she came her adversary rose and cast himself to one side, not entirely clear, however, of the terrific charge, for one widely outspread paw caught him a blow on the shoulder which tore it down with a straight sheer stroke, as though an axe had cleft it asunder, down, down, until the severed limb hung in a ruin at his side. The lioness landed in a heap a little beyond her victim, and in a slow sigh her life flickered out.

Thus she passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for her in the Happy Hunting Grounds.

They heard the roaring outside—a lion's roar in the sunshine is a sound fraught with more terror than its counterpart of the night—and feared the

worst. Dark, wheeling specks in the sky sent the whole party rushing into the reeds, which went down in the onslaught like grass before the mower.

There was no sound, save the crackling of the breaking stems. All was silent as the grave.

They crept on, tracking the missing one by his spoor on the damp game-trails, and by the displaced, and sometimes fallen, stems.

There at the cross roads, prone, motionless, a great yellow mass blocked the way, and beyond, the Sahib, in parlous state.

They raised his head, and he smiled at them. His rambling course was run, and yet he rambled still. Now he was threading his devious road through the reed-tracts, the road he would never take again, crying for water, for air, for the free, wide open plain; next he was facing the foe in her royal fury, marking the relentlessness of her gaze. And it was always of her gallantry he talked.

'I wish I'd a picture of her just as she stood,' he cried, with shining eyes. 'What a picture it would be!' And his voice trailed off.

Whilst the fatally injured man was being carried back to camp the *modus operandi* for the dis-

memberment of the lioness began, and as the skinner of the expedition, undismayed by the fierce slanting rays of the sun beating down on his uncovered shaven head, flayed his beast, he sang insultingly of lions being cowardly creatures who died in reed beds at the hands of a courageous Sahib from afar.

All the flies in all the world joined in at the skinning process, and thwarted-looking vultures took up their positions within a stone's throw. They have such a contempt for man, these birds, or else it is they know they are not worth powder and shot.

All that night the young lion searched for his mother. He watched the shadows closing in, and the silver moon rising in a dusky sky, and then took up the quest. He knew, by some strange telepathy, that this time his wonderful mother was lost for all eternity, and yet some fancy urged him to seek her in the great waste places, to cry for her, to pretend that by turning the corner sharply he would come on her. Alas, the desert knew her no more!

He looked back on all her moods, and loved her in each one. Her worst wickedness was more than three parts good.

CHAPTER VIII

A MIGHTY KING OF THE WILD

'There is no more fearful wild-fowl than your lion living.'
Midsummer Night's Dream.

'Had I been seized by a hungry lion,
I would have been a breakfast to the beast.'
Two Gentlemen of Verona.

In the ordinary course of events the young lion would have remained with his mother, under her eye and tuition, for many months longer. He was stranded at a very early age, and his hunting capabilities were most limited. Any kills he might effect would certainly be attributable more to good luck than good management. The catastrophe that had stripped him of so much taught him his limitations.

For days he hunted without success, and such stalks as he indulged in illustrated his ignorance. They were conducted mostly on dull wide plains, sterile and parched under the fire of the sun, involving a great knowledge of the habits of

antelope, keen eyes, and unfailing judgment, all of which the dead lioness possessed in a high degree, and of which her son had as yet only the most rudimentary comprehension. But he was learning day by day. Each stalk taught him something; with every failure and disappointment he grew in wisdom.

Life did not go very smoothly with him just then; often he went supperless and raging to bed.

Next, charitable fate threw him into the way of three young lions, all older than himself, and ranging in age from two years downwards. He came on them one chilly night, gorging on a hartebeest in the midst of a wind-swept waste, and they suffered the intruder to share the meal.

For a few weeks he remained with the little troop, and hunted on a large scale, madly, joyously, wildly. Those were royal days of illimitable provender, for what the raveners lacked in skill they made up for in courage and force of numbers.

Through the long hot hours the young lion slept on his side, with his fast-growing limbs outstretched, and as night fell he girded up his loins and hunted through the tremulous shadows. It was a grand, glorious existence, free as the winds

and the weather. There can hardly be any life more lovely, none so absorbingly selfish. For him alone the sun set, and the antelope existed.

It was during this short-lived alliance that the lion faced the biggest humiliation of his life. He and his friends attempted to hamstring a rhinoceros —a feat which, with all the enthusiasm of youth and ignorance, the mistaken young beasts embarked upon. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread— and win too, sometimes. But not in this case!

The rhinoceros was not an intact rhinoceros, but a cripple, wounded by the shot of some hunter who had failed to follow up his advantage.

The scout of the lion troop reported the find, and the enthusiasts took up the trail at once. It was dawn—the pale grey east grew roseate; the sun was rising.

The rhinoceros was not bleeding—the india-rubber-like skin had closed over his wound, but it was easy enough to track him by scent.

His unsteady spoor indicated how sick a beast he was; it wavered and broke at every few yards. Now and again he had fallen to his knees on the sand, and with difficulty risen.

The lions tracked their quarry to a belt of thorn cover, and as they reached it, the erstwhile favour-

able wind veered round and blew right over their backs, directly through the place, rendering it unsafe to continue the hunt straightforwardly any longer.

They turned off, with one mind, and making a big détour in the open, cautiously approached lower down, below the betraying breeze.

This masterly manœuvre the rhinoceros discounted, for he had turned on his tracks and gone back a mile or more, after the curious, precautionary manner of his kind.

But the lions were adroit as their eluder, and the oldest of their party knew something about the short parallel lines and converging circles, on which a suspicious wounded rhinoceros runs when in fear of pursuit.

The big bulk had stolen away to another jungly covert—the quiet, penetrative chirp of the rhinoceros bird warned the lurking felines of the whereabouts of their prey.

In single file they approached the spot furtively —a barer patch than the last sanctuary. Taking to clearer country is often an artful stratagem with rhinoceroses ; the wily pachyderms want to see how the land lies, to be ready to receive anyone who nears them.

The young lion viewed the imminent fracas with no dismay. He gave no heed now to his mother's opinion of the dread adversary they were about to tackle so lightly. 'Most dangerous, most savage, most to be feared of all beasts,' she had said, often and often. In his superiority he thought she had perhaps met one or two contrary specimens who had coloured all her ideas. He did not know that every black rhinoceros is as vicious and contrary as the next.

From his ambush behind a thick thorn the young lion caught a glimpse of the prey. Its long neck and head, whose total extent seemed as long as the rest of the unwieldy body, drooped rather, and —where was the second horn his mother dwelt so much upon? He did not realize that, square on, the posterior horn, much smaller than the anterior as it always is, would not be visible.

The huge creature was grumbling to himself, and pawing up the ground into furrows with his foot. Once he wheeled sharply, snorting, and listened, with tiny eyes alert.

Then, in sudden alarm, the rhinoceros tore off at a lumbering gallop, smashing down all before him in his Juggernaut progress.

For a mile or more he careered madly, until the

wound worried him again, and the sick beast passed in on an old game-trail to a large jungle-tract, the haunt of many of his kind, for everywhere their devious paths threaded the density, and their sleeping-places abounded.

The yellow perils followed, and were just negotiating a torturous patch of wait-a-bit when the leader pulled back, telescoping into the others. The rhinoceros was close ahead, in the open, stamping and squealing, very alert and exceedingly suspicious.

The lions prepared for action—they were ready for battle.

The leader, a black-throated beast, utterly fearless, weighty, too, and much older-looking than his two years, engaged the rhinoceros face to face, with the idea of diverting his attention, the while the youngsters set about the hamstringing.

He threw himself, roaring, on to the pachyderm, just missing his horns, clawing with driving teeth and talons at the impenetrable shoulder. The terrific thickness of the skull bones, and the smallness of the brain cavity, prevented any frontal attack being successful.

Wounded though he was, the rhinoceros threw off his clinging enemy as a gigantic cliff does the

sea, and as he cast him away he caught him again with a marvellously quick forward movement, and in a second the lion was thrown in the air as though he weighed but a feather. When he descended the angry pachyderm trampled his adversary out of all semblance to the supple-limbed thing of so short a time ago.

Snorting like an engine, and tossing his head, the rhinoceros tried to get the wind of the other lions, who had shrunk back appalled at the catastrophe.

Considering his prestige at stake, a foolhardy impulse drove our lion into the arena. How was he to attack this armour-plated one? Where? And if he got a grip, how bite it through?

He made a sideway feint at a sortie, amateurish to a degree, meaning to fasten on to the pachyderm's hind leg until his two comrades should rally to his assistance. His enemy was ready for him, and caught him a well-directed blow which ripped up the satin hide in an ugly gash.

The other two lions were nowhere to be seen. No more hamstringing for them. Poltroons!

He could not tackle a rhinoceros alone—a rhinoceros not sufficiently *hors de combat* to prevent its making a brilliant defence. Had he ever really wished to fight a rhinoceros? His mother was

right when she said wise lions take no part in such ridiculous affrays.

He slunk away—beaten.

Days afterwards he came on the big bulk of his enemy, dead and intact. The vultures could not penetrate the tough hide, and, baulked, robbed the carcass of its eyes merely. The lion helped them to better things!

He never saw his quondam companions more—broken reeds wherewith to fight a rhinoceros! He hunted alone again, wandering for months, hither and thither, meeting many creatures, with many minds like Odysseus.

* * * * *

He was now in his fifth year, and though on every side he saw his youthful companions 'settling down' with the lionesses of their affections, our lion had never yet come across a beast who had so much as tempted him to turn his back on celibate habits.

He found himself, after long days of purposeless trekking, near the Webbi Sheybeli (River of the Leopard), the big river of Somaliland. He had never seen a river before, and the music of its wandering waters reminded him of the desert winds in the tree-tops of the oasis where he was born. How long ago it seemed!

He first viewed the shining stream from the rise of a high hill—hills were new to him also. To the south the quavering, flashing gold and silver glory wound its way through a vast gorge whose titanic walls were clothed in impenetrable greenery. It was wonderful—that slow-moving water, to one who had never seen water move before.

The lustre of the setting sun glowed on it, and the smooth glassy surface reflected the pageant of the skies above. Soft-scented winds blew in with messages from the far, far distant sea, taking the scorch from the air.

Everywhere was colour—gorgeous, superb, and heavy with the perfume of tropical blossoms.

Perhaps the most beautiful feature in the wondrous panorama was the lion who gazed upon it. He stood on high, a monarch of his kind. His frizzy coat had gone long since, likewise the dark markings along his spine. He had no mane, and even in his prime never grew one worthy the name. For all that, his bearing conveyed a sense of power and majesty absent in many longer-haired beasts. He was like an old lion in appearance—nobody would have guessed him to be the age he was. He looked a full-grown beast of eight years.

The Somalis have an ineradicable idea that this

river of theirs runs to meet the old Nile, instead of flowing as it does to the east coast of Africa. If you ask them how this quaint geographical 'fact' came to them, they answer, solemnly, 'It is written.'

'Written by whom? Mahommed?'

'It is written.'

And in Somaliland, if that unknown finger writes, and having writ, moves on, not all your tears shall wash out a word of it.

The lion came down from the hill-top and stalked up a nullah in the bottom of a 'tug,' or dried water-course, a tributary of the Webbi Sheybeli. Birds fluttered ahead, a flock of quail rushed into a maze of green. The rocks were steep sometimes, the river-bed narrow, and nearer the greater stream covered with a most prickly blossoming cactus, which, merging with other flowering plants of every hue, made a matchless fairy carpet in labyrinthine tints—a carpet of Nature's weaving.

He passed into a forest region where the most glorious palms lifted their fronded forms to the sky, the only palms the lion had ever seen. All things were different here from the Somaliland of his acquaintance.

Somewhere in the reeds by the river the Hadadah Ibis proclaimed his identity to all the

jungle world—*Ha-ha-hadadah! Ha-ha-hadadah!* —so often and so loudly there was no fear of forgetting it.

To reach the water's edge, save on the well-defined game-trails, was beyond the pushing powers of any lion, so closely and firmly had the tropical vegetation interlaced.

At last! The cool river stretched in front of him, not very wide, nor very deep, but infinitely wonderful.

On the marge, spoor of all sorts of game crossed and recrossed—a bush Piccadilly. The web-toed passage of grub-hunting ducks intersected the squelching imprints of a waterbuck, in which the betraying air bubbles still rose and gasped for liberty. It was a paradise for game. For the first time the lion saw the curious imprint of the hippopotamus, and the weird, characteristic track of the crocodile. Rhinoceroses lumbered through the forest; on all sides he heard the rumble of their continuous passing.

For weeks he hunted the bushbuck of the beautifully twisted horns, and the stately waterbuck, springing on them as they passed down the game-trails to drink at the river. It was a land of plenty for a lion, and lions abounded. Their great

voices wakened the ravines with resonant sound o' nights.

All sorts of beautiful birds abode here, and more varieties of weavers than the lion in his philosophy had dreamed of. Their glorious plumage put his little friends of the oasis to shame. Wagtails fluttered on the stones by the water, unafraid of the still, log-like forms asleep on the sand-banks; exquisite golden-breasted shrikes had larders all about, storehouses amid the thorns, wherein were impaled the sort of future meals shrikes love—frogs, with shrillings for ever ceased, crickets, lizards, beetles, and small birds.

The babbling thrush heralded every dawn with his madrigal to the sun; the little honey-guide longed to find someone who would search out the hidden stores of sweetness in the trees; carmine-throated bee-eaters flitted from flower to flower like gorgeous blossoms. The beautiful African white-breasted kingfisher flickered over the stream, blue as the giant lupins at the edge; the pied variety, too, homely by the side of his wonderful brother.

Once, as the lion stooped to drink, he saw something flash over a stone just below his eyes. It was a small cat-fish, and although from its name it

might have been expected to rank as a sort of distant relation, it frightened the monstrous cousin of the land into abjuring water for two days. As for the swarming crocodiles, the lion's instinct classed them with the rhinoceros, and he gave all such beasts a wide berth.

He hunted Grévy's zebra on the high plains—there were hundreds of them, and they always fed in the centre. It is the easiest thing in the world for a lion to locate a zebra on the blackest night—no other creature has so strong a smell. Finding them was easy enough. It was the getting there which baffled.

The first time he stalked a herd—a beautiful picture in the half-light—he marked down the fine old stallion in charge of the little company. In the grey shadows he looked like a skeleton of himself, as he fed hither and thither—the effect of the heavy black stripes against the white, the merest threads.

The lion waited, well below the wind, behind a bush, until the whole troop of 'extravagantly striped' zebras advanced, with ears pricked, to change over to another feeding-ground, and as the leader passed the lion had him.

His firm jaws closed on the zebra's muzzle, and

slipped from thence to the throat. One colossal paw gripped between the hairy ears, another clung about the heaving shoulder, and still — nothing happened! On went the frantic creature, carrying the lion in the death-rush. This was the weightiest beast the lion had ever successfully tackled. Luck had always been with him, and no kill in all his life had really tested his powers. Animals had fallen to his paws, rather than by them. But this —this was a zebra stallion fifteen hands high, at the zenith of his career.

In the maze of excitement one thought was uppermost in the hunter's mind; he must keep his grip and bite—bite hard. The tension of his muscles tightened, and he pulled down, not yet realizing his enormous strength—that of forty men, Somalis say!

A short, breathless struggle, and over came the big quarry, falling heavily on its neck. There it lay, in a huddled heap, still trembling ere the rigor overcame it.

Standing alongside, with lashing tail, the lion thought he heard voices—voices, perhaps, of those dread creatures he had not seen since the day his mother died. He did not know, because it was unfamiliar to him, that the faint sound on the night

breeze was the weird, dirge-like wailing of the zebra herd crying for the one who was lost: a plaintive habit of these beautiful beasts, and a privilege of the individual band from whose ranks a member has been torn away.

The prize must be moved to a safer place. How often had the lion seen his mother step serenely to a fallen antelope and bear it off, however heavy, as though the big load weighed but a pound or two! Had he not ever in his mind the fancy picture of the gaunt lioness leaping the zareba fence with a spotted heifer in her jaws?

Allah was cruel! The zebra could not be moved. It was so solid, so cumbersome—and perhaps the Sahib Máros were at hand!

He walked round and round it, with no confidence in himself. He grunted with rage, and beat his fore-paws vexedly on the side of the carcass.

Atlas could never have carried the world had he paused to consider the size of it!

Growling at his own impotency, the lion gathered his forces together, gripped the zebra round the middle, and, with every sinew taut, raised the limp bulk as easily as possible.

Through the bushes the laden beast passed,

making no sound, crossed the open space in safety, and so to his lair in the rocks.

In wild fastnesses lions usually eat their victims where they fall, but if disturbed, or occasionally for no reason that can be adduced, they drag, or half carry, their prey to some retired corner where the slayer lies up beside it, in between gorges, keeping off predatory jackals and hyænas.

Just as the sun flamed through the gates of day a big lion, more cumbersome in front than any other our hero had ever seen, crossed between the granitic rocks to which the zebra had been dragged, and close behind—strange that so wonderful a creature should take a rearward place!—came the most perfect lioness, next to his own dead mother, our lion's eyes had ever rested upon. She was very like his glorious mother, the mother he thought turned to dust these many months.

Could he but have seen her, a Phœnix risen from the ashes of her slain self, staring with glassy eyes on a sunless world, with shoulders hunched for the spring which never came off, bottled up in a hermetically sealed museum case, before which a continuous file of uninterested people passed, and have listened to their talk, '*Byeby thinks 'ee's a taiger, becos 'ee 'asn't gort a myne. Thet's not a*

taiger, Byeby! 'Ee's a lyin, thet's wort 'ee is. 'Ere's catalogue. "Order Carnivora. Family Felidæ." Strike me if I know wort "Carnivora" may be!' would he have known the peerless desert queen again?

The beautiful vision paused, looked at our lion who stood up in admiring interest, and roared a greeting. Had he been able to catch a glimpse of himself outlined against the grey of the shapeless rock, in the hey-day of his youth and strength, he would have understood the dazzling effect he must make on any lioness, so that the memory of all other lions must straightway become dim.

From the tip of his tail to his nose he measured an inch or so over ten feet, his height from heel to shoulder topped three and a half feet, and his fighting weight—the zebra knew it—scaled over five hundred pounds.

'Tis the eternal law
That first in beauty should be first in might.'

Purring loudly, the lioness came towards him, and though her mate tried to prevent her passing she leapt over his back lightly, just as the lions caged together at the Zoo jump over each other at feeding-times.

She lay down at her admirer's feet, gambolling, rolling over, enslaving him with her sinuous charms.

The two lions faced each other with swinging tails and hair bristling. Then with murderous grunts they rushed forward, coming together with a dull thud. Once they got a grip they kept it, growling and singing the while. For a few seconds both got in some swinging blows, and the ripping of their claws sounded on the tough skins like the difficult tearing of stout cloth. With fore-paws embracing, cutting, and ripping, each massive creature tried by the straining of every nerve to throw the other. The tension showed in their starting shoulder-blades and in the taut sinews of their hind-legs as the beasts wrestled furiously together.

At last the cumbersome lion gave way, inch by inch, falling back as though the mainspring in him had broken. He fought inertly, with no heart or courage left. And, strange to say, as his enemy slackened and threw up the game, our lion showed no inclination to follow up his advantage, and merely cast off his now passive antagonist with a grunt of rage.

He was not seriously hurt as lions understand

the word, though one ear was completely torn off, and from eye to chin a gaping wound dripped blood upon the sand. What mattered such trivial injuries?

He had known almost every moving passion: the Nimrodic, with its wild grand pride of chase and victory, the fierce freedom of lawless combat, the glory of great thrusts driven home, the sense of jungle brotherhood with the wolf and the vulture, love of parent, of sated gluttony, of intense well-being. Would he not barter all for this!

Surely the lion's god is good to grant so exquisite an emotion!

CHAPTER IX

LIFE WITH A MATE

'A very gentle beast and of a good conscience,
The very best at a beast that ere I saw.'
Midsummer Night's Dream.

'Mated to a lion.'
All's Well that Ends Well.

LIFE went very well then. Unlike so many male animals, the lion had not frittered away his young affections, bestowing a bit here and a bit there, until he stood beggared with nothing worth having left to offer. He gave his lioness a whole-hearted, untiring love. He would have hunted the clock round an' it pleased Her Majesty, or even swum the river, Leander-like, swarming though it was with crocodiles, to win a purr of thanks.

She was such a gentle beast—his very antithesis—and that charmed him, as the unknown and mysterious charms all male things. A gentle lioness — wonderful novelty! His mother had been a fury, sleeping and waking.

Therefore this quiet, beautiful wife of his, with the slumbrous eyes, deep as the sea, held his heart for awhile to the exclusion of all else. What she did bettered what was done; when she roared he'd have her do it ever—all her acts were a queen's.

For weeks they hunted zebras on the Bun Feroli, until zebra meat palled, and the forested margin of the river with its teeming jungle folk called them.

In this luxuriant corner of his world the lion came across many new and peculiar things, and of these the most extraordinary was a Guereza monkey, whom the big cat saw peeping from out an embrasure of shadowy green, ears cocked and all inquisitive eyes, like Coleridge's 'sly satyr peeping thro' the leaves.' The monkey was not large, and its head and body were covered with a beautiful velvety black skin which threw into strong relief the pure white mantle of lengthy hair falling from both sides of the back and framing the quaint little face. And at the end of its tail was a snowy tuft far larger than the lion's own.

After this the lion looked out for the monkey tribe as he hunted their forests, but rarely saw any. The small, ever-moving companies were very silent

in the tree-tops. Only once again did he see a Guereza close to. It was collecting seeds from a low-growing tree by the river, but almost as the lion's eyes rested on it, the monkey leapt from tree to tree, and the spring of its leaps was so prodigious that the great cat thought he had made a mistake in taking the forest-flier for anything but a gorgeous black-and-white bird.

In the sandy paths were tracks exactly like those of bare-footed children—spoor of the maneless baboons who lived in the creeper-clothed crags above the river. When the lion first saw a troop of the formidable apes in the half-light of morning he took them for creatures of his own kind, so lion-like and massive did the moving forms appear. Then, as they neared him, and passed in a steady galloping measure, he saw that these weird ungainly animals, led by a grave, watchful patriarch, had less in common with the King of Beasts than the generality of jungle folk. They were more like the Sahibs who killed his glorious mother.

In certain lights the grey-black coats of the baboons turned all colours, their naked faces were purple-blue and white—such wonderful tints! They had been sitting on a rainbow, too.

In the silence of the night the baboon's surly

bark joined in with the resonant voices of the lions, and every day the jutting rocks all about were crowded with immense numbers of the great apes, hunting for berries. Sometimes they invaded the forest areas, troops of majestic males, disdaining hurry, and odd little sprawling young ones clinging to their mother's back hair, or else riding astride on any beast willing to carry them.

Everywhere in the crannies of the adad trees beautiful topaz, semi-transparent lumps of gum-arabic gleamed like myriad fairy lights; and this glue-substance, with the central portion liquid, the baboons loved.

That they sometimes fell a prey to wild beasts the lion knew, for one night, high on a stony ridge, he saw a leopard feasting on a big baboon, who had somehow or other separated himself from his fellows. These apes, terrestrial creatures, are accustomed to go about in large droves for better protection against possible attack by preying carnivores.

The leopard had not come off scatheless in the affray. Male baboons are fitted out with tusks almost as deadly as those of the leopard himself. And this baboon had used them!

The lions never tried a diet of the monkey tribe;

there was any amount of finer game to be had for the hunting.

They did well with antelopes, playing into each other's paws as though they had been comrades for years. The lioness conducted masterly stalks without any suggestion, by following the line of the stream, startling the unwary bushbuck, lying close, into running up-hill as these striking-looking, greyish-red beasts invariably do when frightened; and at a height of some two hundred feet the ambushed lion waited to receive the first bushbuck up, who was always by the law of contraries the first bushbuck down!

Sometimes, on lucky nights, the lions in very wantonness slew more game than they could dispose of. Hyænas and jackals were not here to be counted on in any large numbers to eat up the bits, but they had their counterparts in the ash-grey Somali mungoose, hungriest of creatures, and the beautiful jungle cats who made their homes in the tree-clothed, rocky banks of the river, which hereabouts they much preferred to the long grass, bordering thick jungle, where they are usually to be found.

Of all the antelopes in this well-stocked region the lions liked best the strongly tasting, tough-skinned

waterbuck. These stately creatures wandered to the river in little companies of twenty or more; but always the soft-eyed does passed first down the game-trail, and the selfish buck, with a care for his own safety and an eye to preying enemies, last. However, as lions are not head-hunters, and have no craving after beautiful backward and outward spreading, heavily-ringed horns, it was all the same to them which came first, does or bucks. The King of Beasts asks for meat only; unlike the sportsman, with his 'Let there be horns.'

The lioness, who was old enough to know better, being quite three years older than her mate, had a desperately hazardous method of falling upon the horned beasts, and had to be shown the correct system, as demonstrated by the greatest lioness who ever lived. She did not take this praise of her long dead mother-in-law at all graciously, in fact it was received as all the animals, four- and two-footed, receive 'people-in-law' talk, with a quizzical pity and a firm intention of doing differently.

The lion himself was always careful not to strike dangerous creatures on the head. 'You will injure your paw if you do,' his mother had counselled in those long-gone glorious days when they roamed the desert together and he learnt to be a lion.

He delivered his felling strokes from one side, sometimes stunning the antelope by a heavy blow on the shoulders, and then manœuvring round to a throat grip, always bearing in mind the dangerous proximity of the merciless horns to his easily damaged paws.

The number of lions now hunting near the Webbi Sheybeli was amazing—our beast had no idea the world held so many of his kind. Their presence was understandable, for game was so plentiful, and wandering tribes thinly scattered. With no enemies but the tsetse fly, and the crocodiles—hardly to be counted—lion life flourished exceedingly.

The fly area was most peculiar and clearly defined in belts. On one side of the river not a fly lived or had being, but cross the narrow waterway, and the pests were buzzing and fussing in their myriads.

The attentions of these harmful insects, which grew as the weather became hotter and the river dried, caused our lion to move his quarters back to the old hunting-grounds in the sunburnt Somaliland he knew. It was wearisome to spend one's life constantly swishing a long tail to and fro. Besides, his lioness was too insular in her ideas—

she must see the world, which up to now had been bounded for her by the Webbi Sheybeli and the plains where the zebras roamed.

During the first two nights' trekking they covered eighty miles; in the next sixty, and then for a space the great beasts hunted round the limited area covered in this dry season with saline incrustations, 'salt-licks,' to which game of all kinds resorted.

Presently the rains came on and flooded the pit-like hollows, driving the lions on again to wider deserts, where the steady downpours made less impression. There is no rain like the Somali rain, and the force of its floods wipes out all traces of game as a sponge cleans a slate.

Then ensued a period of food-scarcity previously unknown in the lion's lifetime; not even the lean days following on the death of his mother had been so hungry as these. No game was anywhere to be seen, the horizon lay bare in the grey murk of the skies—even the ubiquitous dik-dik absented itself. It is one of the most extraordinary things in the wild, this suddenness with which all the jungle creatures leave a certain radius. Whither do they go, and why? When will they come back?

It was wonderful the length of time that the

lions could go without eating, and yet, ravenous, hunt tirelessly night after night, with a latent reserve of strength ready for the struggle which should end the long hours of starvation.

Their tempers were those of perambulating fiends; they even growled at each other, and the erstwhile gentle lioness caught her lord a rap over the shoulder, as he crossed in front of her, which laid it open for a couple of inches. He did not retaliate, and merely voiced his deep displeasure in an earthquake roar.

They roared now throughout the dull rainy hours of the day as well as in the night. The lion had the habit his mother taught him of roaring with head held low, into the ground, which broke up the terrific chords, and made it the vibrating, reverberating thing of wonder it was. He did not look at all handsome roaring, and indeed conveyed the impression that the pain of doing it hurt his throat, or that he was in the last throes of nausea.

They were so hungry one day that they even conspired against the lives of the tiny tailless rabbits who lived in the rocks around—engaging little things with an air of complete detachment from passers-by.

Humiliating sport for the King and Queen of Beasts. But—needs must, when starvation drives.

The long fast, extending over many days, was only thoroughly broken when the prowling sufferers came on a dead Somali, speared from behind, lying by the wells, a victim of a neighbouring tribesman who had caught his man unawares, in order that the tribal condition of blood-taking might be fulfilled, and the victor permitted to wear the orthodox ostrich plume which stands to some Somalis as the scalp at the waist to the Indian.

The lions didn't trouble how their meal came to be slain, but fell to like the famished creatures they were, and consumed the carcass piecemeal.

A lurking jackal paid the penalty of venturing too near, and died the death almost before the great paws of the lion stretched out to grasp the unwary one, so sudden and lightning-like was the sacrificial clutch. Black-backed and silver-haired, with flaming yellow sides, that jackal was a monster as he lay extended.

The commissariat department was looking up!

The rainy season passed, and the green grass sprang up everywhere. Game returned, and galloping forms were outlined on all the emerald plains. In grim Somaliland the rains are like a

magician, who changes as with a wand of gold the brown face of the land to a verdant paradise.

The scape! scape! of the snipe around a beautiful little pool of clear rain water allured the lions. There they found the right sort of grass which instinct told them was good for them to eat. They nipped it off as a dog would do, and ate of it sparingly.

Once, at midday—it was the pairing season—the lion heard the booming of the cock ostrich for the first time. Was this rumbling, low, insignificant sound that which has so often been confounded with the sonorous voice of the King of Beasts? That roar which, lion legend tells, was filched by an ostrich once upon a time? What had they done with it so to change the awe-inspiring notes?

The booming kept on, never varying, with perhaps some far away-resemblance to the minor—the very minor—sullen grunting roar of a distant lion, but with none of his vocal changes. A lion has so many ways of roaring; his grand triumphant pæan of victory is but one of his inflections.

Now the temper of the lioness became most evil, and when her mate came near her she growled as though he were her bitterest enemy instead of her warmest admirer. She went off o' nights for long

solitary excursions, exploring the wilderness with amazing persistency, examining thorn coverts, walking through oases, peering into rocky sanctuaries. Hunting she had lost interest in. Just now, for some whim, she ate to live, she did not, as lions usually do, live to eat.

Then one evening as the sun sank she turned most amiable, and with every artifice and cajolement lured the big lion from the plains where the aoul fed in swarms, to a sparse thorny cover, reed-grown and sheltered. There she intimated she wished to make a permanent home—she was tired of this constant trekking—lions should have an abiding-place. And she lay down to sleep, refusing to join in a concerted attack on the big-humped Galla bull tethered in the Somali zareba six miles away.

So the lion went alone, pondering. Lionesses were queer creatures, and contrary to live with at times. His mother was like that also. It was no wonder his long-dead father should have been the morose beast he was.

For nights now the lion had turned his steps longingly towards the zareba. He could not rest for thinking of the fat on that great upstanding bull. These fine Galla cattle of the tremendous

horns, said to be closely allied to the banteng, or tsine, of Burma and Borneo, are bred largely by the richer Somali tribes on the Galla and Shoan frontiers, and the solitary bull which had drawn the lion's attention was the sole remaining specimen of an enormous herd looted a week ago by the Abyssinians.

He approached the zareba under cover of the thick darkness, passing round and round the encircling outer fence of thickly entwined thorn trees, placed upwards as though growing. The place was built one circle inside the other, as is the usual method in Somaliland, and into the central ring all the animals had been gathered for the night.

The great fires shone upwards in brilliant flumes of light, cutting the darkness in twain, and myriad sparks danced in the light breeze like aerial sprites. Around was the vast sea of sand, rolling away to nothingness, dotted here and there with scraggy trees.

Through a weak place in the outer fence the lion squeezed himself, regardless of the stabbing thorns. He lighted in soft sand, trodden into loose ensnaring depths by the restless tramping to and fro of the herds. It let him down to his

armpits. What a deep hole, and no firm ground at all!

Two fires piled high guarded the entrance to the inner sanctuary, whose fence was a mere make-believe, and not strong enough to keep out an enterprising jackal, much less a lion. There was an inner circle, because custom demands an inner circle, but the outer alone had any pretension to security, and that not much.

Nomadic tribes inhabit these places as they journey after the grass, year after year, and sometimes, like cuckoos, they steal a nest of another's making. As they are occupied for so short a time at a stretch, not much trouble is expended on bolstering the places up.

Between the interstices the lion obtained a panoramic view of the camp.

The camels were in rows, some with heads outstretched flat, snake-like on the sand, asleep, others chewing the cud, watching the sparks from the fire fly upwards, with keen bright eyes.

Round the blaze Somalis slept, prone on the ground, looking, as they lay enwrapped in the swathed tobes which are the day and night gowns, like so many mummies. In the murky background a few primitive tents were outlined, and tethered to

a stake in a remote corner was the Galla bull, standing meditatively with head held low.

Not a breath stirred. Once a jackal called on the silence, and a camel grumbled.

Two or three times the lion walked round the enclosure, his soft pads making no sound, and none of the animals winded him. Now and again he crouched to take his bearings, and his round eyes glowed and glowed with a fiery lustre.

Perhaps the Galla bull saw the twin danger signals, or perhaps some premonition of his impending fate stirred in him. He strained at his moorings apprehensively, and lowed loudly until the soft-eyed camels rose in reproach, a serried line of them shielding the great ox from the sight of the sleepers by the paling fires.

The lion was through the inner fence now, shrinking against the fragile circle, stooping low for his spring. The bull faced the other way, and sniffed the air, as he pawed the sand with his foot.

The spring was terrific when it came. Gathering himself together, the huge cat bounded on to the bull's quarters, clear of the sweeping horns, and struck out with his fore-paws. The force of his fighting-blow was so overwhelming that the victim went down as though pole-axed. He tried

to rise on shaking legs, but the lion had him by the throat now, choking his death bellow. Only a strong male lion could have thrown a bull thus easily.

The scare in camp was stupendous. In the darkness the Somalis knew not where to cast their spears for fear of striking one of themselves, and the shadowy corner where the lion smote his prey was still hidden by the wall of camels. Every woman in every tent shrieked in unison, all the men gave orders in all tones, and nobody did anything.

Just for an instant the scared nomads saw a shadowy grey outline pass through the fence dragging some great bulk along, and once outside the inner circle the lion was comparatively safe, as he battered through the aperture by which he had made his way in from the desert waste outside.

He could hear the excited jabbering of the Somalis. They were regretting, with all the power of their lungs, that they had not been able to attack the lion at the crucial moment of his struggle with the bull. It is a quaint idea with all the tribes that from the first moment of striking down a victim until that victim lies passive, a lion sees nothing, his eyes being hermetically sealed!

If a spearman could but approach at this unguarded instant—much virtue in 'If'!

The lion dragged the carcass across the sand with its great hooves trailing. He had gripped it at the back of the thick neck, so that the horns could do him no damage, and throughout a journey of two miles rested not at all. Then, in a little hollow, he settled down to gorge himself incontinently, after roaring loudly to call up the lioness.

He ate until morning, and as the amber-hearted dawn-clouds tip-toed across the sky, slunk away from the banquet to lie down some distance off beneath a guda tree.

He slept as sated lions always sleep, heavily. And dreamed he heard the tramp of armed Sahib Máros who shook the earth in their passing.

A large force of Somalis was setting forth, in all the panoply of war, to give battle to their life-long foes, the Abyssinians, and as the warriors marched they cried 'Ou! ou! ou! ou!' in deep chest notes, marking time with heavy plantigrade feet the while.

It was a terrifying moment in the lion's day. Would they see him? His tree was an exposed one.

The warriors passed with their 'song' and a rustle of spears—a dust-cloud on the horizon.

All through the hot hours the lion slept, and as evening approached he returned again to the carcass, which, because he had lain up so far away, was now covered with vultures. They rose sluggishly, screaming, hanging their feet, as the monarch approached, and then settled down on the sand. Two large bald-headed veterans peered out from inside the picked ribs—caged. But the lion took no notice. There was nothing left on the kill worth eating. He was no bone-cracking hyæna.

From a dead guda tree a magnificent Bataleur eagle called imperiously. His fine crest was silhouetted against the sky, and the dying rays of the sun lit up his chestnut back and tail to fire.

The lion passed beneath the tree, and the keen eyes of the King of the Air looked down on the King of Beasts. Then, wheeling, the majestic bird winged his way to the carcass, and fought and tore with the humblest vulture.

When the great cat neared the place of the lioness he purred softly, and a deep call note answered from the depths. There was that in it which he had never noticed before, an arresting tone, a tender something which tugged at his heart-strings.

The lioness was lying in a deep brake of grass,

and beside her—whatever were they? Two little fluffy atoms, whose eyes were wide open, gazing on the big world around just as the lion himself had done.

They were his cubs, his cubs, his cubs!

And they ought to be beautiful, they ought to be strong, they ought to be hardy. 'Their original did spring from kings.'

He did not think so much of the weedy female—she was of less account, and had such an anxious, pinched little face, but the sturdy male reminded the lion of his long-gone self, and his great eyes dwelt lovingly on the podgy whelp. Presently the big cat rubbed his huge leonine head against the small attraction, and a friendly lick nearly rasped the skin off the young body, so that the baby cried, and turned away, overwhelmed by such attentions, to the mother he knew already as the Great Provider.

Those were hard hunting days! History repeated itself, and often the lion thought with some gratefulness of the arrow-slain father who had worked so hard and so thanklessly to keep the home going. He knew what it meant now!

The lioness was never anything but hungry, and her mate had to hunt for her as well as for himself.

With the thought of his family in his mind the lion's audacity and daring exceeded belief. He covered miles at night, searching, searching the desert side for food.

Then he took to raiding sheep in the light of day, fearlessly, and in a night of starvation penetrated the self-same zareba of the bull-slaying, from whence he dragged off a young camel.

The tribes were on the alert now, and all hands against him.

For a week or more the lair in the grass had been under close surveillance. The tell-tale tracks winding to and fro, around and back, had given the secret away, and from the top of a lofty guda tree the movements of the lion were daily reported to a white hunter, an unusual type of hunter, and quite a new variety to the Somalis. All this extraordinary being whom they convoyed about the land craved was, lizards! Lizards, when you could bag lions! Truly the ways of white men are passing strange.

The lizard-hunter was not for bearding a lioness with cubs in her den, or for meeting father lion outside, either. Not if he knew it!

Of course, it would be a great thing for a lizard-collector to take home the record lion of the year,

and this tawny neighbour was a record lion—the natives said so. He got as far as asking his headman if record lions submitted to be taken easily.

One evening as the lion returned to a kill of the previous night he found the big hartebeest, which he had carefully laid aside, out of the reach of vultures, for future meals, removed, and placed within a strange little enclosure, a sort of zareba in miniature, like nothing he had ever seen before. It was very odd! Which of all the jungle beasts had gone to this trouble? And why? Did the scaly Monitor lying extended on a near-by rock know aught of this?

He viewed the entwined stems around this novel embrasure with distrust—but the remains of the antelope attracted him powerfully. It was to be had easily; he had but to press through the gap and lift the fragments out. He wanted those fragments badly. The lioness needed food.

The big beast pondered for a long time, walking round and round the spot, sniffing. That there was something untoward he knew.

Suddenly his eye caught the dull glint of a line crossing the entrance to the little zareba. It was a trap. The lion knew all about it now. He had never seen such a contrivance before, and was

familiar only with the primitive elephant-falls of the Somalis. Instinct told him to be careful. It was a trap!

The line he saw was the string or wire which, if touched, would pull off the spring gun set for the lion's undoing.

And then the cunning in the beast came out. He did not breast the wire, as its layer confidently expected, but slipped beneath, working his great body to and fro flat on the earth, with fore-arms extended. As soon as his outstretched talons gripped the remains of the hartebeest, the sinuous body backed adroitly.

The spring untouched, the piece remained at full cock. The lion's wit had conquered.

Days passed, and soon the lioness came out a-hunting again, leaving the cubs at home. It was so reminiscent of his own cubhood. How strange to be an actor, and no longer an auditor!

And the first hunt together since the young ones came was the last. It all happened so suddenly.

The trap was there again, laid a little farther to the west, and in the little enclosure a newly-killed sheep lay, warm and smelling of blood.

The lioness sniffed it out, as the lion stalked a small bunch of aoul on the horizon. She knew

nothing about traps, but she stooped instinctively as the lion had done, and tried to scratch the prey towards herself with outstretched arm.

This time the wire of death was level with the ground, and as she touched it the heavy charge entered her chest. Lashing round and round in her agony, a second bullet entered her spine; it came from the high branches of a guda tree.

The lion heard the dull roaring of his mate, and, answering her, came on the scene with what mane he had bristling, and tail working up and down like a clockwork toy.

The lioness lay in a heap now, twitching, dead.

Her mate looked about him for something to charge—all was silent. The lizard-hunter was not imprudent enough to give his place of salvation away; he had his doubts of the limit placed on the leaping capacity of lions.

Since this extraordinary Sahib hesitated, his shikári opened fire, and the bullet passed within an inch of the lion's flank.

He fled the place then—it was haunted. Traps and Sahibs and death-dealing weapons dwelt there.

The cubs heard him coming and whimpered.

But what could the lion do with cubs—cubs who refused to eat meat, and cried without ceasing?

Unnatural father that he was, he left them to Fate, to the Sahib and the Zoo. What happened to them he knew not—neither did he care. The glories of the desert were all for him, and in the Great Scheme the weak must go under. He had only loved the little ones through their mother—and, after all, they were but cubs. Others would take their place.

Nature ever repairs her ravages, just as she kills every non-supporting atom.

CHAPTER X

THE PRIME OF LIFE AND THE DECLINE

'I come hither as a lion.'
Midsummer Night's Dream.

The lion was now a little over nine years old, at the zenith of his powers. He had not a shred of long hair on his elbows or flanks, but possessed as much mane as he ever grew; nothing at all reminiscent of the tremendous wealth of hair which adorns captive lions. In form he was as unlike a prisoned beast as can well be imagined—he hardly seemed related to his cousins at the Zoo. That melancholy look, that perennial gaze of unsatisfied, gnawing longing, was absent, and the wild creature was much the more beautiful in his virile strength and suggestion of enormous power. His muscles from constant use were tremendously developed, and his great fore-arms and wrists like iron.

As to whether or no he sustained in every particular the nobility which has made the lion the

synonym for valour and quiet, relentless purpose—I think he did.

It is the most difficult thing in the world for those who only know lions from books—much the safest place from whence to bow to them !—to form opinions on the bravery of the King of Beasts. Was ever so oppositely discussed a creature ?

'He goes out of his way to provoke attack.' 'He only attacks on provocation.' 'You must force him to retaliate or he'll run from you.' 'He will go for you on sight, and nothing will turn him.' 'He is the most courageous beast alive.' 'The veriest poltroon.' And so the conflicting statements run on.

The contemptuous view of the lion as expressed by Livingstone did much towards lessening the fame of the greatest of the carnivores. The missionary did not consider that lions in any way sustained their noble reputation, and described for us how he tried, aided by dogs, to 'draw' a lion he had chased into cover. Because the wise animal, knowing all about that discretion which is the better part of the most valorous, did not respond to the 'Dilly, dilly, come and get killed' invitation, his tracker thought him a coward.

The greatest hunter of all great hunters says :

'There is a nobility in the character of a lion which differs entirely from the slinking habits of tigers, leopards, and the feline race in general. Although the lion is fond of dense retreats, he exposes himself in many ways, which the tiger seldom or never does, unless compelled by a line of beaters.'

Every hunter must, of course, form his ideas of the fighting capabilities and all-round bravery of lions from lions he has personally encountered, and the disposition of the beasts is as varied as the diverse natures of human beings. Each lion is, in himself, a continent of unexplored character, only some lions—fortunately for those who stalk them—don't know how to act Columbus.

Perhaps the qualities and records of the animal which, since the dawn of time, has been supreme among all the beasts may be best summed up in the words of the Immortal One:

> 'Reputation oft got without merit, and lost without deserving.'

King's titles generally begin by force, and it follows, as the night the day, that the monarchy of the beasts was bestowed by the ancients on the lion because the robe of majesty was his by right. He had earned it. There are not wanting quibblers,

disguised as naturalists, who question very much the lion's right to pre-eminence. The tiger, they say, is a far more kingly beast, better fitted in every way to sustain the regal dignity.

Were we able to depose the lion, we should in that restless spirit of change which would, an it were possible, alter the tides and the seasons, probably do so.

But he would be an Emperor still.

In these days all things go by appearances, and the battle everywhere is to the beautiful. If kingliness went by looks, then the lion will have his kingdom whilst the race of lions live; the mien of no other beast can compare with that brave, proud aspect, that awesome, lofty, remote majesty—'tis unmatchable.

If the monarchy of the beasts went by cleverness, we should bestow the crown on the elephant; if by fearsomeness, on the black rhinoceros; if by courage, on the buffalo; if by cunning, on the leopard. And so on *infinitum*.

After the death of the beautiful lioness at the hands of the lizard-collector, the lion remained a widower for a week. The second Mrs. Leo simply happened. She was a middle-aged, colossal beast, at a loose end for a husband, and, oddly

enough, got the pick of the jungle. The proverb of civilization, 'Everything comes to him who waits,' is reversed in the brute creation With them it is, 'All things wait for the animal who comes.'

This lioness came, saw, and, after a fashion, conquered. The lion was very lonely, and there were but few, if any, unattached lionesses roaring just then. It was flattering, too, to receive such frank admiration, and he was caught out in a moment when he was not quite himself—his nerves were shaken.

He had trodden on a straw-coloured asp, the Egyptian cobra, a terrible reptile, quite four feet long, and its forward lunge only missed the lion's fore-arm by a hair's breadth. Foiled, it retreated to a thorn bush, and reared up, hissing its displeasure.

The lion hated all snakes, though the two others he knew so well, and met everywhere; the dark tree-snake of the low thorn bushes, and the fiercer reptile which preferred the sandy ground, were both tiny as compared with this 'pretty worm of Nilus.'

The lioness came into view, blinking in the sun, stopped to sympathize, and remained so long she thought she might as well stay altogether.

The lion soon wearied of her, probably because he had not to fight for her. It is a masculine trait to value only those things difficult to acquire and hard to keep.

She compelled him to admiration, though, in her first stalk, a brilliant caprice, when she slew a sentinel hartebeest as he stood near an ant-hill with the herd feeding on one side of him.

Hartebeests very aptly illustrate their name. They are 'hard beasts,' and hardest of all in each individual group is the sentinel. He is all eyes and ears, never slumbers or sleeps, and is almost impossible to come on at close quarters.

It was night, not a very light night, nor dark, just betwixt and between. The lioness crept to the edge of the open country whereon the antelope fed, and every time the sentinel looked the other way, the big cat progressed a trifle up wind, always keeping her eyes fixed on the ant-hill crowned by her hopes.

The beautiful chestnut-red of the hartebeest's coat was dim now, and but a shadowy shadow of its beautiful day-time self.

All of a sudden the sentinel was possessed of the gravest doubts of this hillock grown up, mushroom-like, in an hour, and then the lioness

lay passive for ages until the fears of the wary antelope lulled themselves to sleep once more.

Once started, no lion could overhaul a hartebeest.

The feeding herd did not concern themselves at all, but cropped the grass contentedly.

The lioness was doing well, and covering the ground with magical rapidity, when the doubts of the sentry took firmer hold of him. He leapt down from his pinnacle and stood undecided at the base, ears turning this way and that, nose sniffing as he felt the wind for the first breath of danger. The success of the stalk trembled in the balance.

Suddenly that weirdest of sounds, the hunting call of a hyæna, broke the silence, and a panic of alarm ran through the whole herd of hartebeests. Instantly, such are the chances of stalking, when the position of things may change from failure to success, from success to failure, in the blinking of an eyelid, the game was to the lioness.

She caught the sentinel as he stood hesitating and, terror-stricken at the dread sound, debating flight.

The velocity of her spring was terrific, her muscular proportions being what they were. Her victim had not a chance. She killed him in silence, and then roared and roared to call up her new husband to the wedding banquet. It was a

heavy one—with a varied menu. For the lion himself had slain a soft-coated Speke's gazelle buck, which he dragged over the sand with head trailing, until the strange little protuberance of skin on the nose looked like the swollen results of such hard treatment.

What, I wonder, is the use of this odd adornment peculiar to the beautiful Speke genus? Every extraordinary feature of wild life is there for some reason of protection, or escape, or well-being. Nature arranges things so to balance accounts a little 'twixt all the jungle folk.

After the mighty feast the lions sought water, leaving the bones to be cracked by the hyænas.

Dawn was breaking, but the wild world was hungry still.

A fine aard-wolf, larger-eared than the striped hyæna, but distinctly resembling one, was busily delving with strong claws in an ant-hill for termites. He scraped vigorously until he reached the huge combs at the bottom of the galleries, when he bolted comb and inhabitants in hurried gulps.

Across a burnt-up desert waste, parched and arid, a body of monstrous land tortoises were migrating to fresh fields and pastures new. They had eaten up all the green grass, and wanted more. They

were all sizes, from ancient adults, with carapaces nearly a yard long, to beautifully marked little ones, measuring perhaps four inches along the curve. Their dotted black and yellow colouring was strangely familiar. What was it they resembled? Then the lion remembered. The leopard of the changeless spots.

In a reedy hollow a big, red-necked vulture was breakfasting off ostrich eggs with the air of a connoisseur. His terrific beak smote the hard shells with axe-like force, and lo! the treasure-houses opened, and no mistake about it! But the vulture was no gourmet. All ostrich eggs were alike to him.

At the wells multitudes of camels, shepherded by strident-voiced Somalis, were standing in a sort of lake, quite a good-sized piece of water, and, warned by the turmoil, the lions with noiseless tread turned off unseen into a wilderness of khansa scrub.

On the top of every branch big enough to hold their weight formidable-looking Tree Monitors perched. Their fierce looks and lengthy dimensions bewrayed them. They were quite harmless, and made no use of their tremendous claws.

In the thick cover the lions strode over an

ostrich nest upon which the male bird was dutifully sitting. Because he was in the way, and because the King of Beasts has a long-standing quarrel with all the ostrich tribe, the lion killed the big bird before it had time to rush away or defend itself. The wait-a-bit grew so thickly, and the long neck seemed made for biting off, so bitten off it was.

The huge bird lay there, a mass of tossed feathers. The lion looked at it complacently—the first ostrich he had ever slain. And now that he had killed it he did not want the carcass—so small a quantity of meat as compared with such numberless feathers.

There were seven eggs in the nest, never now to be hatched out. For the ostrich mother in Somaliland, whatever she may be elsewhere, is a very undomesticated feminine, and leaves most of the parental duties to the father, who must often find that housekeeping in the jungle has its drawbacks. It is really very difficult to raise a family there.

The woodland undertakers flocked to the corpse —business-like, knobby-headed ants and exquisite sexton beetles with eyes of luminous horn. The dense underbrush rustled with the soft hum and stir of hungry, moving tiny creatures.

Near the rocky hollow, overgrown by creeping plants, where the lions lay up for the day, the ancient skeleton of an elephant mouldered. The covert had been his sepulchre these many years, and there was little left of him but his mighty skull and weather-worn tusks—what a find for a Somali trader! The tusks were of no great proportions, three feet long at the outside, and extremely slender. The tusks obtained from Somali elephants never reached any size or weight to speak of.

At night the lions visited the wells—free now from the Somali hosts—stirred to liquid mud by the restless feet of numberless camels. The water was hardly fit to drink, and sudden death would seem to be the probable result of tasting it. Not at all! It gave a hunting impetus to the lions, who grew game for anything, and secreted themselves in a patch of hig aloes, scarcely big enough, one would have said, to conceal a dik-dik. But—the beasts managed it all right, merging into the contour and colour of the spot until they were one with it.

Long practice had made the lion an adept at sorting out animals in a landscape, and it was a perpetual puzzle to him how it came about that

the antelope were not so gifted as he was in this direction. Their eyes, so quick to notice a moving object, are slow to locate a stationary. Nature has allotted them powers of mimicry as a defence, second only to their wondrous speed, but curbed their ability to pick out a debatable patch with the celerity of the carnivores.

Nothing deceived the master lion mind. A bit of what you and I would take to be grass the great cat recognized as another lion, hunting too; a herd of oryx, standing stock still, knowing that any separate movement would betray them, he knew at once as a herd of oryx, dissembling. And no human eyes, unless they had followed and marked down the game, could have disassociated the antelope from their environment.

A large number of aoul sought the muddy pool, stopping about four hundred yards off fearfully, because the night wind blew from them to the water, and they were apprehensive of preying enemies who were in all likelihood lurking in the hinterland beyond.

Thirst conquered their terrors. Halting every few yards, and occasionally rushing back a few paces, panic-stricken, to return again as the silence reassured them, the creatures entered the shallow

water, and drank and drank until the noise of the united gurgles filled the air with an harmonic chord of sound.

It was a night of dim half-lights, starry but moonless. The larger antelopes are very suspicious in moonlight, and fear even their own slanting shadows, frequently preferring to go thirsty rather than approach a water hole lit for their undoing.

How interesting it would be if all the beasts could make a schedule of the sort of weather they most liked! The lions would choose perpetual storms, tempests dropping fire, fierce rain, and rushing winds.

Strange, this liking of the great carnivores for atmospheric turmoil, during which their activity and audacity are greatest.

The lions were lying close together flat on the ground, watching their opportunity, motionless save for the twitching of their tail extremities—uncontrollable ends! Surely all the nerve-cells lions possess are centred in their ungovernable tail tips.

And as the aoul left the water for pasturage the big cats were ready for them.

A rush! The lion killed immediately, but the lioness, failing to fix her teeth in the neck of her

prey, missed him clean. She had fallen on the strong young buck carelessly; he threw her off and escaped.

Luckily for the lioness, her mate was too much occupied with his own affairs to criticize those of another, and there was no feline 'Told you so!' with which to contend.

In all his long career, to the very end of it, it was never the lion's luck to kill a wart-hog. He tried—oh, many times, and ate of the toothsome flesh when he could get it, but never brought off the actual slaying.

His glorious mother had said it was quite simple to kill pig if you went the right way about it. Perhaps lionesses have the enviable knack, for his new consort gave the lion a lesson a week or so after the killing of the ostrich.

It was morning, and the beasts were hungry after a blank hunting night, angry too, when, suddenly, up jumped an old slate-grey hog, thirty inches or so tall at the shoulder. He had been asleep in the long jungle grass, and for an instant the sun blinded him.

Sighting the lions, the veteran pig turned on them, thinking himself hemmed in, falling across the lioness, who instantly sprang right over her foe

into a thicket of wait-a-bit. She was not ready to receive the charge—indeed, desired to meet none—for if a boar gets within striking distance his movements are so quick and dexterous that there is but little hope of avoiding severe injuries from the tossing upward rip of the huge tusks.

In his heart of hearts the lion secretly admired the fearless wart-hog, most hideous of Nature's works, more than any other of the jungle people, and placed him on a pedestal among his gallery of great beasts. What other creature is so courageous, so strong of heart, so nimble of foot, and, with hackles up, so like a lion?

The malicious little eyes of the boar gazed intently at his enemies as he faced them firmly at twenty paces. Then the lion routed the enemy by a flank movement which drove the pig, snorting savagely, in the direction of the lioness once more. But this time Her Majesty got him cleverly in the joints of his harness.

Having inflicted a dangerous and crippling bite, she did not seek to hold her spirited foe, knowing that a wounded pig is a most dangerous customer to tackle.

A furious scuffle to right and left, and then, with a wild scream of wrath, the gallant hog, every

bristle on-ended, and blood pouring from the tremendous wound at the back of his neck, charged his assailants, who scattered as he came. The lion could hear the grinding of the white tusks as the maddened animal shot by—the sound made him shiver.

The fast thundering rush slackened, and the game creature fell, rose again, fell.

Warily now!

Even in his death agony a wart-hog is the most intrepid thing that breathes, and with head drooping, as the rigor overtakes him, will often rouse himself for a final vengeful effort.

With flanks and rear protected now by an overhanging broken rock, the boar stood at bay, his great head a-swing, and eyes gleaming like long-lit lamps.

The lioness might have hunted wart-hog all her life, so adroit was she. Darting in on short, provocative rushes like a dog, she tried to lure her quarry into the open again, where she hoped to finish him.

It was a fight of fights, and the lion stood aside in order that his mate should have the game and the credit, too. He was not altogether actuated by unselfishness as he crouched upon the sand. Those

scythe-like tusks had a curious menace in their curves!

The pig knew the advantage the rock gave him, but felt his on-coming weakness. He must leave his protective fastness, make a bold bid for safety, and endeavour to gain the tangle of dim deep grass ahead.

In an evil moment he abandoned his position, and, setting her whole weight for the blow, the lioness administered with her huge paw a stroke on the spine which felled the pig on the sand.

Even with hind-quarters paralyzed he was not vanquished, but rose on fore-feet to retaliate. The lioness was skilful, but not skilful enough to avoid the upward sweep of the driving tusks. They struck into the soft flesh beneath her shoulder, and to the day of her death the great cat carried as a record of the encounter a cicatrized scar over which the hair never grew.

The gash incapacitated her for days, and it was during this period that the lion forsook her. It grieves me to have to record it, when by all the laws of lion chivalry he should have stood by her, tended her, and even worn himself to a thread in whole-hearted endeavours to keep her larder replenished. Alas! that tradition so often resolves itself into mere tradition.

It was not as though he had the excuse of another lioness tempting him to his fall. He merely grew wearied of hunting for two, tired of the lioness's dissatisfied growlings, bored with her querulousness. He put the Marehan Desert between them, crossing the daunting place, deserted by man and beast, where nothing lived or stirred, in three terrific treks. He gave no heed to the morrow, whether the country could feed him, and travelled by night.

It was nearly full moon again, and the hideous parched place looked quite pretty as it tried to pass itself off as delectable country.

By day the lion lay panting in the fiercest sun that had ever scorched him. There was no shade anywhere, no tree, no rock, no shelter of any kind into which even a weasel might creep.

Half way across the desert the thirst-stricken beast came on some water holes, but they were dry!

As he finished his third trek he crossed a caravan route, the road to Wardare over the Marehan, and in a rocky nullah obtained the first water he had lapped since setting forth on his journey. It actually oozed through the rock, instead of standing sluggishly beside it, trickling down into a beautiful

fern-clad pool. He remained here a whole day and night, drinking and drinking again until his senses reeled.

The lion was now within a very short distance of the east coast line. He knew his Somaliland well, from the Webbi Sheybeli to the ends of the Haweewa country—a traversed tract.

In his hunts he came upon a real lake, quite a fair-sized piece of water, formed in a basin of gypsum-like rock. He had not seen so much liquid *en masse* since leaving the river.

Many kinds of waterfowl floated on the glassy surface, and waded on the edge. One variety of wader looked as though he walked on stilts, so tall were his stick-like legs. Yet he was very elegant, as he strode about the shallows, with a dignity great as the lion's own.

The Egyptian goose, a perfect scheme in metallic colours, nested in the vast reed beds surrounding the lake, herons and egrets, too, whilst the Lesser Falcon, huge-taloned, kept the numbers of the feathered world down. Teal delighted this bird of prey with their unsuspicious ways—they so readily fell into the cruel claws. Though they quitted the land with a springy dart or arrow-like movement, with no sort of warning, such as an upraised head

or hurried quack of alarm, their settled flight was so well adapted for a falcon's purpose.

At first the lion loved the cool waters, and made up his mind to remain near them whilst the game supply lasted, but after a little while, the daily vista grew uninteresting, and he turned his face to the deserts again. He was a creature of the jungle and the plains, and no amphibian.

For the first time he saw a flight of locusts whose millions darkened the sky, and took a whole morning to pass. Some never passed at all, but remained in countless thousands on an area of sand which they changed to rainbow colours. They were the ordinary locust of many countries, but to the astonished lion they were a miracle of Nature; a new sort of rain, perhaps—he did not know what to make of them. When he essayed to cross the tract monopolized by the insect host their hard, shell-like backs offended the surface of his pads. And he circumvented the region.

It was spring once more. The jungle had dressed itself anew in robes of emerald. Game was plentiful, and the lion dined royally when he listed.

One evening as he stood over a kill in a bit of reed country, he realized that he was being stalked

—he winded human beings. Stretching his great neck in magnificent disdain, the lion bounded off into the wilderness, the tuft on his tail being the last his trackers saw of him. He put some miles between them.

Some lions, he knew, considered that the game was always to the King of Beasts, if the monarch was at all worthy the title, but our lion knew better than that. His royal mother had fallen at the hands of a miserable, puny Sahib, and no greater beast than she had ever walked the jungle.

* * * * *

The seasons passed, the rainy, the dry, all very much alike, until the lion realized, with a stab at his heart, that he was growing—old. It was so strange, this realization of life behind him. Is it not one of the most difficult to believe of all the great truths?

He had watched other lions ageing steadily, steadily, failing and passing away from the haunts which were theirs, and thought how impossible it was his wonderful Majesty should ever grow like them. He had gambled royally with the years as though they had no sinister end or meaning. They would be good to him, and pass him lightly.

He was not as other lions. And the years had caught him!

He felt his age not so much in his springs and kills as by his experiences, in memories of the mates he had seen out, and the numberless cubs raised to maturity.

His claws no longer grew and sharpened by the work they accomplished, and his teeth, what were left of them, were level with his gums. This made but little difference to his eating, for the great processes, or papillæ, of his tongue, inclining backwards, licked off the toughest meat from the bones with the effectiveness of a rasp, and once off the bones the lion bolted all food whole.

It was in gripping antelope that his lack of talons and teeth became a hampering deficiency. The dentition of all cats is arranged mainly with an eye to successful seizing of prey, and for shearing flesh off bones by the cutting action of the flesh teeth. The lion had lost his important tusks or canines long since, and, bereft of their holding and rending power, his hunting methods were considerably curtailed.

He who had been young was old!

'What nights and days he'd seen, enjoyed, and pass'd.'

What hair's-breadth 'scapes from Midgan arrows, Sahib's traps and bullets, hunger, battle, spears.

His last wife—he had thought her a Joan to his Darbie, they had hunted together so long—had just left him for a smaller lion, an æsthetic-looking beast with one eye white and the other normal. He let her go rather than battle for her, for of what avail for the heaviest, weightiest lion of the desert to try conclusions with a rival properly fitted out in the tooth and claw line?

Besides, the great cat was not altogether sorry to lose her. He had had to do a great deal of pretending about the Darbie and Joan business, for he had no deep treasury of affection left on which to draw, his heart was spent and bankrupt with over-trading. He had 'views,' too, on matrimony —fatal attitude! And considered that mated lions saw far too much of one another. It killed everything. Henceforth he would live and hunt alone.

CHAPTER XI

THE EVIL LATTER DAYS

'The feats of a lion.'
Much Ado About Nothing.

'This lion is a very fox for his valour.'
Midsummer Night's Dream.

Now, as extreme old age drew on, and in most of his attacks the lion failed to grip and throw the rushing antelope, he took to human beings as his chief source of food. They were so supremely easy to bag, so tender to eat.

He visited no karia regularly, neither did he confine himself to a given radius, but travelled miles and miles, striking suddenly, so that no man was sure of his life from moment to moment. His marvellous vision, desert-trained, followed the pharos-lights of camp fires through the thick darkness of the darkest night.

The strongest zareba fence was not strong or high enough to keep him out; if the man-eater could not lever himself through the thorns, he

jumped over. And he was cautious, having much of the furtive stillness of the leopard in his methods of attack and general cunning. His victims were carried off almost before they were conscious of the dread presence. Sometimes he killed, out of pure wantonness, two or three men in a single night, choosing the most crowded hut of all, pulling the sleepers out from their rough coverings, and mangling the bodies ere he made off with one in his jaws. No spear ever caught him as he fled. So bold and indifferent did he become that he rarely troubled to drag his victims far away, but cracked bones all night with brutal realism in the closest proximity to the karia, decamping before dawn.

Though but the merest stumps of teeth were left him—the grand old beast was over thirty years old now—he retained all his powers of endurance and strength, whilst his colossal symmetrical form was as supple as ever. Somalis who had seen him, and lived to tell the tale, compared the bulk of this Proteus lion, who assumed a hundred shapes as the story grew, to that of the rhinoceros. 'Big!' they said—'big as wiyil!'

The Somali encampment by the Abriordi Garodi (Graves of the Old Men) was in a state of ferment.

Three nights ago a man had been seized and carried off as he cooked a strip of antelope flesh for his supper, and last night—was ever so hungry a lion? —the Headman's favourite wife fell a victim, being dragged out from her tent in the farthest recesses of the zareba, in spite of all the shouts and spear-throwing of the tribesmen, who set fire to one of the huts in order to throw some light on the dangerous search. The prowler of the night never exposed himself, and as it was the height of folly to pursue the attack in the darkness, the Somalis returned to the make-believe shelter of the zareba.

With the dawn every spearman joined in the chase, and about a mile from the encampment the hideous scene of the banquet was stumbled upon—a stained, tossed tobe, and in its folds fearsome pieces left for the hyænas.

Taking up the trail, the whole body of Somalis followed hard on the spoor, only to overrun it in a stony belt of country which kept the secret of the beast's passing. The lion was too adroit for his enemies, and took no chances.

As they spoored in all directions, the Chief came on tracks of a large caravan, and, overtaking some part of it, gathered that the outfit belonged to an Englishman on a sporting trip, and almost

before he knew it the solemn Somali was telling his woes, through an interpreter, to the Sahib, and begging him to rid the land of the desperate lion-spirit.

When the Sahib propounded his quickly-thought-out plan for the lion's undoing, the Somali listened attentively, because the white man's native shikári intimated that in his own far-distant country his master was a Prince, which made it more puzzling than ever why he should come so far to seek meat. Surely Princes could get all the food they needed in England. In Somaliland a native Prince would loot ere he would go hungry.

Most of the nomadic tribes, especially those of the Ogaden and the Mijertain, look on the sporting spirit with distrust, suspecting ulterior motives. Well, it is not easy to convey to a savage mind that any man takes on the *sturm und drang* of a big expedition merely because he loves it. 'Trophies' in some countries descend to being meat, merely—meat, which of all things, to the uneducated, tops the scale. After all, the savages argue, one can only eat a certain amount without being very ill; therefore why such trouble and energy to procure unlimited quantities?

And the Sahib's brilliant idea was this: A lion

will always enter by a weak place in the thorns in preference to forcing a way through or jumping over. Therefore, leave an enticing gap all in readiness for the royal progress, and by the gap, in the very walls of the zareba fence, part and parcel of it, so that it would not arouse suspicion in the mind of the most circumspect beast alive, a strong mâchan must be constructed, in which the deliverer, with ready rifle, would sit all night. Also —and this was the crux of the whole scheme—a dummy figure would be fashioned and laid by the camp fire to draw the man-eater, who, whilst passing through the gap with eyes fixed on the central attraction, or whilst trying to carry it off, was practically certain to offer a safe and sure shot.

It was a really clever idea, even if it wasn't entirely original, but a dodge suggested by the greatest of all great hunters, Sir Samuel Baker. Never heard of Sir Samuel Baker! NEVER HEARD OF SIR SAMUEL BAKER! Good Lord! Well, never mind. It was a ripping notion, anyhow, and worked like a charm, as it would do again to-night.

All the afternoon the young man worked untiringly at manufacturing a creditable imitation of a Somali. He began, watched admiringly by all his caravan, with a heap of durr grass, which he

shaped roughly into the form of a man, and enveloped in a long tobe: not the everyday white tobe—this was no ordinary occasion—but a more ornate affair altogether, the resplendent khaili, dyed red, white, and blue, fringed with orange.

The native shikári contributed a finishing touch in the form of his own tusba, or praying chaplet, and fastened a business-like biláwa, or short stabbing sword, round the shapeless waist. With a spear arranged alongside, the illusion was complete. A tired Somali slept.

'Beats Louis Tussaud into fits,' said the Sahib contemplatively.

Triumphantly, the dummy was borne on the back of a most unwilling pony to the encampment, where all the inhabitants turned out to meet it, greeting it derisively with spears held aloft, and crying 'Mot! Mot! io Mot!' (Hail! Hail! And again Hail!)

The building of the mâchan was in progress. The floor was of stoutly-laced stems, the sides also. It was left open to the sky, since no lion could leap its thorny walls—the Somali Chief put twelve feet as the limit of the average lion's upward jump. Covering the gap a look-out hole was made—all was in readiness.

Round about the zareba all sorts of strange scare-lions had been placed, poor protections against so fierce a foe! And the tribe set about removing them, lest for this night they frightened His Majesty away. There were bits of torn herios arranged flag-like on broken spears, and ingenious schemes for making scratching noises in the wind: rough bits of iron strung on leather lading-ropes, whose duty it was to scrape against a hard flint set in a contrivance of wood.

Then, because they were grateful to the young Sahib for the deliverance to come, the best horsemen of the little tribe, a mere handful as compared with many of the wandering tribes, prepared to amuse their guest with the species of entertainment known in Somaliland as the dibáltig, a great equestrian feat, and the native manner of doing honour to a distinguished traveller. The Headman, his loss of the night before considerately forgotten in the exigencies of the hospitality of the moment, led his performers out on to the open plain, threading in and out between the clumps of grass, with the afternoon sun glinting on the shining spears.

The ponies, typical native ponies, were got up for the occasion in trappings of red, many tassels and frills of lions' manes round their shoulders.

The riders were garbed in brilliantly-dyed tobes, purple and yellow, green, scarlet, and blue, and each carried a complete warrior's outfit of shield, spear, and short sword.

On the waste of sand the Somalis formed up in an even line, waiting for the Sahib, sitting on an evacuated ant-hill, to give the signal to commence. One of the horsemen advanced, and, sitting in his peaked saddle, began a low droning chant.

'Oh, you white man from afar, who comes not to steal our camels or our wives, but to slay the lion who would slay us, we people of the Asha tribe say Salaam to you, Salaam, and again Salaam!

'May you be strong as the lion and big as the rhinoceros! May you have health, wealth, camels, and many wives!'

He sang this on the principle of an English anthem, a little wording going a very long way. Then, at a more piercing note than usual, every man left the line, and, spurring his horse with the sharp spear, dashed off frantically, up and down over the sand, never colliding, and casting spears in every direction, to catch them up again as the ponies galloped past. Some throwers attained a distance of seventy or more yards.

As the pace grew hotter, the dust rose in clouds,

and the energetic forms looked like phantom riders in a mist. They seemed to lift their steeds over the ground by the grip of the knees, and the balance was perfect. At a signal from the Headman, the whole team rode towards the audience, who had to sit tight and affect to be in no fear as to the issue of so furious a charge. With spears held aloft the Somalis united in the strident 'Mot! Mot! Mot io Mot!' and the dibáltig was over.

In the late afternoon three sheep were roasted whole—the entire encampment helped at the cooking—and with bowls of rice and ghee (native butter) as a sweet, everyone made merry at the Sahib's expense.

Life costs very little to the nomads of Somaliland. A roof and four walls of skin and camel mats; food of the sheep, which multiply exceedingly, or in good times of camel-flesh, in bad of the antelope of the plains; fire of the thorns and guda trees.

As night drew on, fine and starry, the herds—not many, for the tribe was a poor one—were driven in to the shelter of the big zareba, and the fires piled generously. All the Somalis, clinging to their spears, followed the women into the arguls, or tents, poor frameworks of bent poles, over which

were thrown the worse-for-wear herios and antelope-skins, which let in the rain and the sun and the wind-blown sand.

There could be no thought of sleep. With that gap in the zareba fence, how was it possible to sleep?

It was all very squalid and filthy and dust-laden, but picturesque withal, with the strange, softening romance of the desert and the sad, appealing glamour of the African night.

The Somali Headman was the last to withdraw. He liked this merry-eyed, odd being who had travelled so far and so good-humouredly to get meat. He begged him on no account to quit the mâchan until daylight, whether the lion came or whether it did not. The Sahib opposed no ordinary beast, but a bad spirit who knew hidden things and set at naught the plans of man.

The Sahib immured himself in his mâchan alone. As a rule he was not fond of such uninteresting shikár as this night-shooting usually provides; this remaining silent in one position until you get cramp in your limbs and pins and needles all over you, and you strain your eyes at impossible shadows and see phantom troops of lions in the very wind.

It is always so dark, too, and so hard to define

the quarry when—rare bit of luck!—it does come. He had made the muzzle sights of his rifle quite visible by means of luminous paint; a much better contrivance, he considered, than a strip of white paper on the barrel.

The native shikári—the blighter!—had shown no wild anxiety to hunt the man-eater; he had tracked so many, he said: it bored him. And, suddenly, the stalwart Somali contracted some incapacitating illness which made him go to bed at once.

What matter? There was none too much room in the rickety contraption as it was. If you so much as moved a foot something gave way.

Insects there were in plenty—mosquitoes, gnats of all sorts, and the quaint little red velveteen spiders, which the Somalis believe drop from the clouds when it rains.

And the silence of it all—the wonderful immeasurable silence! The hush of night falling on the sun-stricken day!

Now and again a quail whistled plaintively, or a couple of sand-grouse, flighting to drink at the wells, croaked hoarsely. And these small, sweet sounds of the wilderness seemed to make the stillness yet more acute: they were so tiny in such illimitable space.

By the camp fire the dummy body loomed like a big white cocoon, and for all the world reminiscent of a wearied Somali in an attitude of sleep. So lie most Somalis at night, in times of peace. A great supper cauldron stood alongside, steaming still. Sometimes the Sahib in his mâchan thought he got a whiff of the tasty contents—an oryx stew. It was fancy—there was no wind at all.

The whole idea of this dummy bait was a ripping one. Blessed be Sir Samuel Baker!

Through the aperture in the fence the prowling lion must see the extended form, and, deceived and tempted, pass on to his undoing. It would take a wiser than the lion to guess the trick. Anyone would take the figure to be that of a native overcome by fatigue.

Fancy rambled on to the taking of imaginary tape measurements. Would the lion really top the record? Its pug marks certainly said so. Perhaps it would show to greater advantage if set up whole. It would be a pity to convert so noble a trophy into a mere skin. The record lion of the world! Was ever such a bit of luck?

The sky grew black, impenetrable. Had twenty lions come just then, it would have been impossible to distinguish their outlines, save as they neared

the fires, where long fitful streaks of light cut the darkness like flaming swords. Then the thunder rolled, and vivid flashes of lightning lit up the camp.

It was an eerie scene, and the outlines of the uneasy cattle moving round the cauldron reminded the keen watcher of something he had witnessed upon the stage, something—oh, what was it? his memory was like a sieve to-night.

And presently it came back to him—the heath in 'Macbeth,' the gruesome witches:

> 'By the pricking of my thumbs
> Something wicked this way comes.'

But the 'something' was so wearily long about it. The mâchan, too, was hideously uncomfortable, and, after all the forethought and careful directions, not half strong enough for the purpose.

Once, in a lull in the battling elements, an eagle-owl cried out in exact imitation of the lowing of a leopard, most weird and eldritch of sounds, with such precision that only one like the Sahib, versed in the lore of the wild and master of the jungle-folk, could have detected the imposture. Dark shadows loomed heavier than before, and all the while, though he could see nothing, the wary

sportsman covered the gap with his rifle as he rested it on the ledge of thorns.

Heavy rain commenced to fall—real Somali rain, in rivers and broken water-spouts, putting the fires out, and hope, too. The dreary hours of watching were unavailing now, and it was not safe to venture forth; but after a further half-hour the gloom lightened up in drifts, and the gap outlined itself once more. Even the recumbent, half-drowned form by the fire-that-was showed grey against a darker background.

Things weren't so bad after all.

Suddenly, on the tense silence, the listener heard the most arresting sound in the world—the long-drawn guttural sigh of a lion, sure sign of hunger. Can any man hear it on the stillness of the night without feeling a tug at his heart-strings? He must be made of steel an' he can.

The beast was there all right!

With every sense strung and alert, the sportsman listened, and quite distinctly caught the furtive pad, pad of some heavy soft-footed creature, passing and repassing laggingly, and dwelling on its steps.

It was an eerie sensation to be so close to a treacherous man-eater, divided from him by a fragile belt of thorns merely.

Could the beast, with its cat-like power of seeing in the dark, divine that someone waited in the zareba fence? Out on such childish fears!

Another hour dragged by, and still the lion never crossed before the mâchan, still the figure lay where it was so temptingly placed, still the camp lay quiet as the grave. Now and again a camel grunted, and the rain dripped, dripped from the soaked tents.

Not for a moment did the watcher withdraw his attention from the gap. His eyes were riveted there.

Terrific cracks of thunder rent the skies, and the storm, with unabated fury, broke forth again. Another crash——

A hot, furry odour penetrated the mâchan. The spirit of the storm had come like a ghost, without sound, without warning. There was hardly time to turn round, none to disentangle the rifle—the lion had his prey in a flash.

Hearing the piteous shrieks, shrieks so awful that they seemed to echo when all was really still, the Somalis rushed out of their water-logged tents, and hurled themselves, a compact body of spears, to the rescue.

The mâchan was empty, with a great gaping hole in its rear.

CHAPTER XII

COMING TO THE END

'If I should as lion come in strife
Into this place, 'twere pity on my life.'
Midsummer Night's Dream.

'In war was never lion raged more fierce.'
King Richard II.

It was impossible to kill the man-eater, not because of his ferocity and strength, but because his remarkable cunning, much more like that of the leopard than the rougher-hewn wariness of the King of Beasts, coupled with an almost supernatural luck, frustrated all efforts to ensnare him. Constructed mâchans were useless, traps unavailing, stalks, drives, baits, ineffectual, though many tribes abandoned their daily work and devoted themselves exclusively to the pursuit of the dread enemy, scheming and plotting his downfall, week in, week out.

The most ridiculous snares were set, primitive devices of Somali evolving. One, the most to be

relied upon, was a circle of pitiless thorns chosen from the wait-a-bit for their size and strength, contrived with all the points facing to the centre. This remarkable patent was laid in jungle paths down which the lion might be expected to travel to the game plains at night, and once let the beast, big as he was, get his foot into the tenacious trap, he would, with ankle pierced by the vicious thorns, soon be placed *hors de combat*, and through loss of blood and acute lameness fall a victim to his human enemies.

First catch your lion!

A second much-thought-of snare was a mere running noose of thick leather lading-rope, adroitly concealed in the long jungle grass, to which a large baulk of timber weighing forty pounds or more was attached. If the man-eater would kindly place his great foot well in the middle of the rope circle, and go forward, the noose was calculated to draw up tightly and anchor His Majesty securely until the vigilant Somalis appeared on the scene, with spears and Sniders, to end the business.

Again—first catch your lion. And a desert-bred beast over thirty years old is not taken easily.

An astonishing immunity from disasters de-

scended on the many karias which had suffered so severely from the depredations of the lion, whom all the tribes had by now come to regard as an evil spirit, difficult to rout and almost impossible to kill. For a whole fortnight nobody disappeared, and gradually the natives lost their fear of venturing forth, and roamed the wilds again in ones and twos as of old. All thought that, by some lucky blow of Nature's striking, the lion had disappeared for ever. Somewhere on the wide desert, his bones, picked clean by vultures, lay bleaching in the sun—the country was free. And round all the camp fires o' nights the triumphant hunting song rose to the skies.

But, as it happened, the lion was occupied in alternately lying up beside and feasting upon the vast carcass of a rhinoceros fallen by a distant game pool, and so long as the Gargantuan banquet lasted, a banquet no other beast dared dispute with him, the big cat was well content. If such appetizing meat always fell to his claws so easily, he would be no man-eater.

But everything has an end. Even a rhinoceros is not an inexhaustible food supply.

One sultry evening the lion preyed once more on a human being, striking down a big Somali as

he drew water from a well-hole a mile or so from his karia.

Under cover of the thick, low-lying thorn scrub the tawny beast crept up within springing distance, and took his unsuspecting victim from the side, crushing his head in an iron grip of the muscular jaws as though it were a cocoanut.

For a little distance the lion dragged the body over the sand, wantonly, and as he was sniffing about preparatory to breaking up his meal, the sound of voices disturbed him, voices coming nearer every instant. Grunting with rage, the colossal animal bounded off into the jungle, and was gone.

Dismay reigned again! The dread spirit was not dead, but active as ever.

Consulting together, the dead man's tribesmen thought it likely the lion would return to his prey if it were left totally untouched, and in a moment, with the resourcefulness of despair, the Chief, summoned to the scene, formulated a plan—another of the myriad plans which should lay this scourge of scourges by the heels.

There was no possibility of constructing a mâchan—no trees worthy the name grew within a radius of many miles. Besides, time was every-

thing. Four holes must be dug, holes deep enough to hold a man in each—corners of a square, in the centre of which would lie the dead body. Within the entrenchments the four best shots of the tribe would be installed for the night, sportsmen who could occasionally get some work out of the wretched old Sniders—cast-offs from the garrison at Aden, and smuggled into Somaliland by rascally traders.

There were six of these Snider heirlooms in the argul of the Chief, and to him they represented the security, the safety, and the peace of the world. Who could contend against them?

It does not matter to the Somali of the wilderness—a mere child in brains and sophistry as compared with the artful, wide-awake person who hauls your boxes about in Berbera, or goes out with you on shooting expeditions—if his treasured weapon is but a mere length of gas piping, with sights set on it so that he can call it 'rifle.' The maker is nothing, the skill of the user nothing, the name rifle, combined with the grip of the village blacksmith, is enough.

With half the tribe working willingly, and—wonder of wonders!—in silence, the holes were dug to the required depth, and as night fell the

chosen four, with their all-inadequate weapons, descended into the yawning pits.

And we think ourselves brave to venture into the domains of the King of Beasts with the latest thing in rifles in our hands!

The four were left alone, standing upright in their holes, which hid them entirely. By stepping on to a little shelf cut in the walls of the place each man could instantly raise himself to eye level, and thence, by further steps, to rifle range.

Far away to the west the reflection of the camp fires glowed on the sky, heliographing messages of encouragement to the entombed ones beside the still form, lying as he fell, face down on the sand.

Beside the well the dead man's quiver of sharp arrows, smeared with the black, glue-like poison beneath the barbs, lay where its owner had so lately placed it. His rigid hand still grasped the water-bucket, and round his waist an unsheathed knife hung limply. In the shaven head was the terrible clutch which had pierced the brain.

The avengers knew exactly what they had to do. Being so deeply buried, they calculated that no scent of them could reach the lion and give him warning, and on his appearance, at the first faint pad, pad around the body the Sniders would speak.

Weary half-hours dragged by; the gaunt figure lay desolate on the sand. Even the hyænas did not sniff it out.

The moon came up, suffusing with silver radiance the dreary scene. The shadows round the well-hole grew soft and luminous, fire-flies lit the reeds.

Sometimes a dislodged stone rattled to the bottom of one of the pits, and the watcher would grip his Snider tightly, thinking that the Great Moment was at hand.

The strange power there is in silence frightened them. The desert at night! It is a world unknown to all Somalis. Tense moments of watching inspired feelings of awe and terror, strange imaginings troubled, imaginings that with daylight would cause no concern at all.

Black clouds hid the face of the moon, rolling up from the horizon in gloomy companies—all was darkness.

A night-bird shrieked on the stillness, its note the epitome of desolation and solitude; a sighing wind—the requiem of the night—swept over the gloomy sepulchres.

Sunrise! The first blush of the morning tinged the grey clouds, and from the amber-hearted dawn Phaethon in chariot of gold drove his molten steeds

in shafts of quivering light across the dimness of night's still brooding shadows, putting the stars out. Afar on the dim horizon, wrapped about in a filmy mantle of mist outlined in fire, the Somali karia loomed.

And the watchers laboriously crept from their holes, discouraged, stiff with cramp and the chill in their limbs. One, two, three of them. The fourth —where was he?

'Askar Mahommed! Askar Mahommed!'

He did not answer to his name—his pit was empty!

There lay the victim of the night before, untouched. The vultures were gathering, coming from all points; the kites had arrived already.

Round the hole where the fourth man had been hidden away was a confused mass of pugs, a little blood, and the Snider in the bottom of the pit. Winding away was the track of a huge lion, and the drag of a heavy body across the dewy sand.

Like the disciples of old, the watchers had slept, and in those moments of unconsciousness the ravener had taken toll.

Askar Mahommed was gone.

This last fatality nerved up the Chief to instant

action. It was the proverbial straw. The united tribe, with its numberless spearmen, must beat the whole district for miles and miles around until the destroyer was taken.

The best spoorers of them all were turned on to the trail winding from the hole of terror to the shadowy unknown.

The ground was dry and hard—it was the hot season—and after the first quarter of a mile or so the track of the lion was difficult to hit off. But it takes a lot to baffle a jungle Somali on a game trail. The sandy wastes are his books, legible, however faintly printed. The smallest grain of displaced sand comprises an encyclopædia, and when the track lapses altogether, as tracks have a provoking way of doing, an adept in the gentle art, from his knowledge of the ways of the particular beast he is after, can pick up the path again half a mile farther on, without breaking. Every worth-anything Somali tracker follows spoor at a walking pace; his marvellous intuition detects the slightest signs, and he rarely stops to satisfy himself that things go right.

In the rains even a Siwash Indian, densest of native trackers, could follow up a likely line, and act and conclude and deduce as unconsciously and

confidently as a Somali; but in the dry season, when the sun bakes the land, it is no simple matter to trace the spoor of the heaviest beast. Even the rhinoceros leaves but little record of his passing.

About a mile from the scene of the night-watching, the lion had supped—a gruesome scene, and from the grim evidence his pug marks, clearer now, led on to a water pool two or three miles away. There was the impress of his great feet as he stooped to drink—what other beast had such mighty pads?

The spoorers held steadily on, leading the array of spears through a close thicket dense enough to have concealed a dozen lions, and this the men beat as they passed through. It seemed certain that the great quarry had travelled still farther. He was heading, apparently, for a patch of jungle cover, four or five miles away; the Somalis knew it well: a spot which had something of enchantment in it, a spirit-haunted corner into which, in times of calm, no native would penetrate.

This mass of cover, three-quarters of a mile in circumference, had an underbrush of wonderful thickness, and the tribesmen, baffled for the moment, walked round it, examining the fringe of the forested region to see whether or no the lion

was yet in its recesses, or had passed on to some other sanctuary.

Convinced that the enemy was within, the Somalis drew up a plan of campaign. Six of their number, armed with the redoubtable Sniders, were to post themselves at the most likely-looking breaking points, and the rest of the little army, four hundred strong, would proceed to beat out the cover.

Such was the terror of the lion that the fear of the eerie place, which tradition marked on the map of memory as a covert to avoid, was pushed aside.

In the surrounding trees look-out men were placed, to shout directions at the crucial moment as only Somalis can shout. They are the worst tree climbers in the whole world, and they hate such ascents, and would manage to fall out of a rhododendron bush, but on this tremendous occasion the candidates for the upper branches exceeded requirements. The trees would not have held so big an army of volunteers.

The method of the drive was very haphazard and primitive as we understand drives, but there was resolve in it and purpose—and these two factors, united, have won the greatest battles of the world.

The large company, singing the death song of the lion, spread out, and penetrated the jungle.

After all the years the lion recognized the wild chant, the tang in the air which spoke of arrows, dogs, death, and destruction. Sense of sound is almost immortal, and is the last of all memories to succumb to the silent power of Time. He remembered! And the scene changed to the death-day of his father.

> 'This is not a lion—do not think it!
> It is a coward and a thief, who would frighten us.
> It is not with needles that the lion is slain.
> He is great, he is strong.'

Ah—how strong! The great beast half rose in his embrasure amid the thorns, and growled low to himself.

They should see!

Nothing but an elephant—and a clever one at that—could tackle such density with any crushing effect, but so far as men could beat so difficult a fastness the Somalis encompassed it.

An hour of song, and insulting epithets hurled at the unseen foe, and then—a mighty shout from the extreme right, handed on from mouth to mouth down the lines, 'Libbah! Libbah!'

Word was taken to the Chief that the enemy

had momentarily exposed himself, and gone forward.

He had the makings of a great general in him, that Headman, and divided up his little army into two manageable hosts, with a strategy and finesse unexpected in a savage. One, detailed to be led by old and experienced spearmen, was to penetrate the close cover on the far side and beat across ; the other had to follow their leader to the spot where the big cat was reported to have been seen.

Arrived, the Chief placed these brave spirits in an immense circle, in fairly clear country, around the covert within a covert where the lion was supposed to be lying. All concealed themselves. Every bush and clump and bit of interlacing armo scrub was utilized.

Then the men on the far side got to work, yelling and singing as they came.

An ominous stirring of the scrub bushes. The jungle cover parted, and with lithe-stretched shoulders the mighty lion shook himself half free of the density, then crouched low, until only the flat of his skull showed and his one remaining rounded ear.

A chance shaft of sun glinted on a tell-tale spear —the secret was out. The lion rose to his full

height, and stood with tail lashing from side to side, looking fearlessly about him, uncertain whether to stay where he was, to charge, or to retire. Retire had it, and quick as thought he was back in his citadel once more.

The Chief came out from his thorn bush, critical now of the scheme that failed. They ought, of course, to have exposed themselves at the same moment as did their enemy, and come to grips with him.

The lion would have his foes know that he was not a beast to be trifled with. He had given inches already, and they were taking ells. Threatening moans warned all and sundry that the angry feline was in no mood for banter. 'Push me to extremity, and your fate is on your own head!' sang in the intimidating, guttural notes.

But the relatives of his many victims were not to be caught out so easily. A volley of spears rained on the protecting forest roof.

Next the wielders of the Sniders were called up and instructed to fire in volleys, or as the weapons would, and if there was no immediate effect, to go on firing until the beast charged, when the firing party must bolt behind the body of spearmen for shelter.

The moment the desultory fire opened His Majesty came forth in all his glory, roaring grandly, the incarnation of mischief. So fast was his rush, so purposeful his mien, that most of his opposers wavered and shrank and broke away. There remained a company of some scattered fifty men, the flower of the tribe, and these faced the enemy unblenchingly, with spears poised, stamping their feet to the accompaniment of the deep-toned 'Ou! ou!' until the ground shook. The Sniders were gone. Nothing remained but the time-old weapons, spears and stabbing swords.

And the lion came on, covering the ground in short bounds, amid a volley of cast spears. All fell wide—a spirit lion indeed! No man could prevail against him.

A stalwart old fellow, with the marks on his brown arms of many a battle, ran to meet the foe —a rare and splendid sight. With all his force he cast his heavy spear, and the well-directed javelin caught the lion's wide chest, stuck for a moment, and then fell to earth. And as the man threw his weapon he jumped to one side.

The great cat doubled, and was on his assailant in the instant, crushing him as he passed, and then, in the turmoil, the tawny thing bore on through the

lines of his enemies, and was gone. A cavernous brake received him—an impenetrable place.

Worsted, the Chief decided on firing the covert, and stationed his most reliable men outside in a big circle which encompassed the whole belt. Then with his fire stick the Somali summoned the spirit of flame.

The thorn was damp, and took some time to ignite, but once the fire got a start it simply ate up all before it. The tribesman fell back farther and farther until the distance between each man widened.

Volumes of smoke rolled away to the northward, obscuring the day. The heat grew insupportable, and before the advancing demon tongues the affrighted jungle folk broke cover. Strange that in all their conscientious beats the Somalis had seen no sign of game. The whole area might have been deserted of the beasts, so close had all the creatures lain up.

First came the birds, flying wide and wild: beautiful Harlequin quails, in zigzag course; francolins, with gleaming plumage flashing in the sun; sleepy, blinking, wondering owls; pigeons, hawks, and kites, in fellow-feeling strangely akin; and Paradise whydah-birds, so hampered by their tails that they could only lollop along.

A grand old boar rushed out, hackles on end, tushes gleaming white against the fiery background, back well humped, and mobile snout carried at the charge. Into the open his thundering rush carried him—and so to safety. An aard-wolf now, furtive and wary—not for him the careless taking of chances, the reckless stampede. He stole forth with the quick right-and-left glance of his tribe, the first thing his mother taught him. His coat was stiff and erect—like a ghost he passed.

Tragic-faced little rabbits, with no reason in their race, scrub squirrels, pale foxes, jungle cats, and wild-eyed lesser koodoo fled to the plains. A grand Speke's gazelle buck crashed through the underbrush tempestuously. The very grasses tingled with terror, the wilderness palpitated with unwonted agitation.

Last of all came the lion, and he charged through the line awaiting him like a Juggernaut. Nothing could hold him. Sniders, spears, shouts, were equally unavailing. Not for a moment was he nonplussed. He sought freedom, and with reckless impetuosity made his bid for it, breaking the flimsy cordon with ease.

Had the Somalis but taken their quick little ponies along, it is possible they might have rounded

up the wounded beast. As it was, they saw the tawny form streaking away across the desert, and knew that the wit of the creature had conquered once again.

Never stopping, the lion hurried on, across wastes and tree-dotted plains. His wound smarted cruelly — the need of rest urged him forward.

A beautiful green oasis loomed ahead, such a place as his soul loved. Into its heart the great creature plunged, and, seeking a resting-place, fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIII

DEATH OF THE LION

'He is not sick.
Yes, lion-sick, sick of proud heart.'
Troilus and Cressida.

'And so the lion vanished.'
Midsummer Night's Dream.

When he wakened from heavy slumber at the close of the eventful day he knew that, by some strange whim of Fate, he had been drawn back to the oasis where he was born. There was the recess under the thorns, overgrown a little, but cavernous still. Many lion families had used it since his baby days.

He had been a cub here; it was his one home in all the vastness round about him. He had never thought much about it before, but now he knew that his very heart strings were twined about the little sanctuary—he would never leave it again.

As he looked back innumerable memories

crowded in on him, and the pageantry of the glorious life he had lived passed in all its brilliancy before him, panorama-wise.

No doubt he had been hungry and hot often, tired and thirsty, weary and worn—he forgot all that, and remembered but the vanished wonders of the days that were dead—the first sunrise; the wide horizons where the game wandered; the water pools at night—ah, glorious hunting hours!—the rolling river; the plains dotted with the zebra herds; the lioness of all lionesses; the dim shadows of zarebas—all gone!

And the chameleon still lay on the bough, dead to all appearances, save for the eternal wakefulness of its inscrutable eyes; the weavers, too, were building again, tearing off the grass in their beaks, and actually tying knots, half-hitches.

Did they build throughout the year? for it was not springtime—the ache in the lion's bones spoke of autumn. He did not know that the cock-birds of this species build themselves nests for roosting purposes—the sybarites!

The breath of the long-ago days lay yet upon the shady place—the desert with its brazen sun was far off. Here was rest, oblivion, deliverance.

Almost, he seemed to hear the soft intake of his

mother's breath, and the murmurous buzz of myriad bees echoed down a vale of years.

The world had no such mothers left, such bees forgot to hum!

He passed wearied down the forest aisles, lame not only from his spear wound, but by the many thorns which had penetrated his great feet in the course of years of travel. These had now worked and climbed their cruel ways under the skin of his legs until they reached the armpits.

Just over his huge leonine head hung the low-growing fruit of a branching, flat-crowned tree, and little painted bats, like gorgeous butterflies asleep, almost touched his tangled short mane.

So silent! So quiet! nothing but the distant booming of a hornbill, most curious of notes, evolved in the depths somewhere, deep-toned as a drum. And as the lion stalked on he saw the blue-black serenader perched on a dead stump, with a serrated weapon of a bill resting on the glossiest of chests.

In his weak condition it was most difficult for the lion to obtain food enough to keep life going. He tried to spring, as of old, on the oryx incautiously feeding on the outskirts of the green oasis. In bygone days it was a very favourite

hunting method of the great devastator's to leap on the unheeding prey from dense ambush. Often he would encompass twenty feet or more, and strike down his beast with unerring precision.

Now such ventures were always hideous failures, and he landed on the sand far short of his quarry.

He kept himself going by the carrion he found, going out at nights into the open, never travelling far, to raid from hyænas and jackals, until spring came in with smiling days, and the starved beast did well for a time by tracking out newly-born aoul kids—tender morsels for a toothless lion—watching the mother's movements and marking down the place to which she kept trotting. His sense of smell might have been trusted to sniff out the little ones, covered up so ingeniously in their cradles in the thorn brakes, but it was far less trouble to go straight to the spot and despoil the instant the doe left for pasturage.

When the hunter's luck was in, the old lion killed the tiny dik-dik as it fed on favourite berries and herbs. The beautiful little animals were on the move night and day, and gave away their whereabouts by pattering back and forth, forth and back, on the sun-dried leaves which lay thick upon the game paths.

So careless were they that very often their huge enemy did not even trouble to conceal himself over much, but lay waiting by the trail until the small antelope trotted serenely by. He could always calculate on their shrill whistle of alarm being the prelude to an inquisitiveness strong as death—and inevitably ending there.

Anything unusual seems to charm a dik-dik. Death lurks on every side in the jungle, but for one of the larger antelope that falls a victim to the appetite of the great carnivores, I should imagine numerous dik-dik run into the very jaws of the enemy in mistaken endeavour to take the census of his teeth.

The grand old lion was failing day by day. The spear thrust still troubled, and never really healed. Sometimes he thought he had felt the last of its throbs and darts, and then, as he hunted in his pitiably apologetic fashion, the cruel gash would open wide again.

From the purple-green mystical depths of the night forest lurid eyes ever watched the old lion, so weak and doddering, but still a king, and much too powerful yet to be pulled down by the lurking forms who followed like phantoms wherever the stricken monarch went.

He looked ahead—green eyes! to the side—green eyes! in the rear—green eyes!

He knew they were there, knew what they waited for. And, spent though he was, he felt no fear at all. So royal a beast as he could not fall the ignominious prey of dogs.

To be the sport of hazard! He refused to believe that it could be so with him. Nature had contrived so wondrous a creature for something better—her forces could not be so relentless, so cruel.

But they were always there—those preying, watchful eyes, following the dying lion from the dark thorn background throughout the forest, and little by little the dread of their continuous presence irked him.

He knew, for the first time, what it meant to be afraid.

He was full of fears, and dreaded lest in the daytime, during one of his heavy sleeps, his foes might fall on him unawares. He forgot that he was really safest in the daylight hours, since hyænas and jackals, like the rest of the animals of prey, are prowlers of the night and return at dawn to their burrows along the regular paths which they invariably follow.

Every wind in the dim aisles frightened him, the sun slanting in great shafts through the trees, the low calls of the guinea fowl, the hum of the myriad insects, the rustle of the dried leaves as they fell to the ground like broken-winged birds, made him tremble.

Sometimes he roamed the oasis seeking old landmarks. He wanted to find the spot where his mother had slain the Sahib ; his dull blood thrilled at the remembrance. He had killed countless men since that far-off day, but no master stroke of his had equalled the glorious felling blow which taught him what lions can do.

But the forest had swallowed up the glade of his dreams ; imperial avenues of green covered up the Sahib's grave. It was all as though no weighty drama had ever been played—just as it was with his life.

Other lions frequented the oasis also ; he heard them all about him in the dark and silent nights, and sometimes their great voices broke the woodland echoes until the wind hushed and the shadows trembled.

Once at dawn he saw a beautiful young lioness close to—their paths met, and he gave greeting to her. She had nothing to say to him, and in the

pride of her royal youth thrust his age down his throat and nearly choked him.

He lay close in the emerald vastness of the forest; beside him, under a drooping leaf, a wonderful white butterfly lay with outstretched wings—Titania asleep.

In the darkness the great beast felt safer—darkness was still his day.

Would the light hours never cease?

The sun set in a burst of glory, flashing to rest with golden brilliance—an Emperor's diadem.

The wearied animal thanked the lion's god for night. Behind, in fretted silhouette, the dark green line of the oasis showed sharp and clear; before, rolled the vast arid plain stretching away to limitless horizons. The moon stood out in a sky of ultramarine—a wonderful silver.

A panic of fear was on the stricken creature, only in the open, far out of reach from the terrible eyes of preying enemies, did he feel a semblance of his long-passed courage. The well-beloved haunts, the breath of the desert, filled him with confidence. Over the moon-lit sand he walked laggingly, head carried low, with piteously trailing steps. He was tired of foot, and alone and very old.

Suddenly on the silence came a long-drawn call,

again and again. It lashed like a siren across the endless wastes, and on the old lion the effect was magical. The years rolled back—time was nothing. It was a hunting night. He raised his head, and looked about in royal disdain. Hyænas? Jackals? The King's satellites—no more.

They took him from behind—ever the way of cowards. In rear and on flank they beset him, pinning him by sheer weight of numbers to the sand.

One last stroke, one great stroke! Terrible to see, the grand old beast freed himself from the teeth of the yelling pack, sprang clear, and stood for an instant the wraith of his former self, tail lashing from side to side, haunches quivering, fore-feet well apart.

With a forward slashing rip the nearest foe was laid open by the blunted claws, a second, a third, a fourth he flung to one side as though in sportive play. Then they closed on him, knowing his ebbing strength.

And so, fighting, fighting, he went down.

With the dawn came a vulture, sailing in majestic, narrowing circles, first of the birds of prey to scent the battlefield. Then another, and another.

Across the plain a deep-toned roar vibrated. Terrific and solemnly awesome, it reverberated on the stillness of the grey morning, and seemed to repeat itself in echoes when all was really still.

The hyænas, wrangling and snarling over the banquet, cowered as they caught the message of the wild.

The earthquake roar again, repeated five or six times.

'*Ahna on ben el mera! Ahna on ben el mera!*'

THE END

TWO DIANAS IN SOMALILAND

BY

AGNES HERBERT

Some Press Opinions

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BY

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